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THE
GRANGE GARDEN
A Romance

BY
HENRY KINGSLEY

AUTHOR OF
'THE HILLYARS AND THE BURTONS' 'NUMBER SEVENTEEN' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. III.

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CONTENTS
OF
THE THIRD VOLUME.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. EDITH'S DEFIANCE	1
II. EDITH'S RESOLVE	17
III. ARTHUR AS NURSE	26
IV. EDITH TAKES UP HER POSITION	35
V. CROSS IN TROUBLE	44
VI. CROSS RETURNS TO POLLINGTON	55
VII. ARTHUR MANAGES CROSS	63
VIII. GEORGE'S OPINIONS	79
IX. ARTHUR FINDS HIMSELF TREATED WITH SINGULAR CONFIDENCE	87

558209

vi *CONTENTS OF THE THIRD VOLUME.*

CHAP.	PAGE
X. STRUAN AND EDITH	98
XI. GEORGE WONDERS WHAT ARTHUR WILL DO WITHOUT HIM	115
XII. CROSS SEES THAT HE MUST ACT	127
XIII. OUR DEAR LADIES TAKE THEIR FIRST RAILWAY JOURNEY	143
XIV. A HAPPY EVENING AT POLLINGTON	159
XV. GEORGE GIVES ARTHUR ALL HE HAS	176
XVI. THE END OF A TURBULENT LIFE	183
XVII. THE SECRET DISCLOSED	190
XVIII. ARTHUR AND CROSS SETTLE MATTERS ALONE	203
XIX. ARTHUR ABDICATES	210
CONCLUSION	217

THE GRANGE GARDEN.

CHAPTER I.

EDITH'S DEFIANCE.

EDITH BRANSCOMBE one morning showed to our two ladies a letter from Lady Longmynd, her old friend, from whose house she had been married at Florence, asking her to come and spend a short time with them. They thought that she would have refused to go, but were surprised to find that she was rather eager to do so.

‘You are not tired of the Grange, my love, yet, I hope?’ said Lady Alice.

‘Not I,’ said Edith. ‘I hope that you will keep me here until I go back to the convent. But I should like a little change, and I want to see Lord Longmynd again very much. I am earnestly bent on going away from here for a time,—I meant to say, going somewhere else for a time.’

‘It is a good resolution,’ said Lady Madeleine. ‘It will make you more used to that world I hope you will never desert again.’

And so she went to Hellingsworth with her maid, and wrote of her safe arrival. And it is a most curious thing that Lady Madeleine and Lady Alice never said one word to one another on the subject.

Father Wilson came in shortly after she was gone, and they looked at him enquiringly. All he said was,

‘Everything is going on perfectly well,—

better than I hoped for. We must win unless some idiot or scoundrel interferes.'

'Which is generally the case in your popish gunpowder plots,' said Lady Alice.

'I agree with you,' said Father Wilson ; 'the Holy Roman Church would go on its glorious way rejoicing if it were not for idiots and scoundrels.'

That was not exactly what Lady Alice meant, but she laughed good-humouredly, and said,

'Bother the man, he has always got a neat answer ready. You must have some Irish blood in you, Father Wilson, or you'd never be so clever. Well, I'll not growl at you, for I am in it myself. And where is Lionel ?'

'I saw him yesterday,' said Father Wilson.

'That's not telling me where he is,' said

Lady Alice ; ‘ the Jesuits never give a fair answer to a question.’

‘ Well, then, I don’t know,’ said Father Wilson.

‘ And you just told me that you saw him yesterday.’

‘ Well, so I did ; but I don’t know where he is now. He was *going* for a few days into the country, but he may not have gone.’

‘ I see,’ said Lady Alice. ‘ Well, God send us all deliverance, as they say in England when they have made up their minds to hang a poor fellow-creature. Well, is he reconciled to Clara’s marriage?’

‘ Yes, he is glad about it indeed ; he has been staying with them, and will be there much of his time. Wotherston is unused to office, and so Lionel is absolutely invaluable to him. In fact, Lionel is the Under Secre-

tary to a great extent. Clara has taken to the work splendidly, and the three fuss at it like three bees in a flower. I never saw Lionel more happy.'

'I wish we could see him happier still,' said Lady Madeleine.

'That will take time,' said Father Wilson. 'I depend much on Struan.'

'I don't,' said Lady Alice : 'I think the whole thing nonsensical and far-fetched. However, I pledged my word to you and Madeleine and Wotherston, and I won't withdraw it.'

Meanwhile Edith was with Lord and Lady Longmynd, and most kind they were ; they never alluded to the past, and she remarked that they never mentioned Lionel. This was most considerate of them, she thought, and she was accordingly grateful. She had three or four quiet days, for the town was nearly empty. They went out

driving and shopping, and Edith found that she liked it very much. She had money, and she bought such things with it as pleased her : she was almost amused at herself to find that she once more began to like buying personal adornments. Lady Longmynd was going to give a party, and she discovered that she had ‘nothing.’ She therefore went about and bought ‘something,’ and very pretty and charming she looked in it when she had got it on and was standing before the glass, as no one knew better than herself. She was by no means nervous about this party, somehow : there was nothing to frighten her,—what should there be ?

She, who in one of her fits of helpless terror, partly congenital, and partly possibly fostered by her convent breeding, would do such insane things as that of joining the

Stephanocanthines, was now turning round before a glass and receiving the compliments of her maid with complacency. Ten days ago she was on her bed in agony, praying to be taken back to the convent as her only refuge. She had forgotten all that just now, and was going to taste once more the pleasures of that world from which she had twice fled in vain.

She was a good and true creature, but she could no more get on without guidance than a vine could grow as straight and firm as an elm. It was fortunate that she was a good and true creature, for she was standing on the verge of a fearful abyss, from which no human hand could save her. Her unconscious maid watched her going down the stairs—lower, lower, lower, very slowly. On the landing was a large mirror, and she stopped to look at herself and adjust her

jewels : then she went on lower and lower still, and passed into the drawing-room.

She gasped for breath, for Struan stood before her talking to Lady Longmynd.

Lady Longmynd introduced him, but she quietly remarked that they knew one another very well, and passed on, with the growing darkness of a new terror in her eyes.

She saw Struan no more until the end of the evening. Sir Charles Touchstone took her into dinner, and he was as amusing as usual, but even he could not make her laugh ; her face would have made his own merry Castle dull. He saw that there was some deep anxiety there which he could not fathom, and he left joking, and talked with her about quiet country places, and about the poor ; and finding that she was a Roman Catholic, argued pleasantly and gently with her on the subject. This distracted her

thoughts, and she thanked him for it in her heart,—nay, more, in words.

‘I have a deep sorrow to-day,’ she said, when they were going to part. ‘I wish I could have been more amusing, but *que voulez vous?* I thank you, however; and I tell you as pleasantly as I can, that if you were to turn me away from my religion you would ruin me.’

Sir Charles parted from her with pity. ‘Someone is ill-using that woman in some way,’ was his solution of the matter. But there were six men left at table, of whom five were dead against him, and so he mounted his hobby and forgot all about it. When he mounted his hobby he had five opponents; long before they went upstairs he had but four, for Struan had slipped away.

Into the drawing-room. Four ladies

were there; the one he wanted was not there. He went into the conservatory, and found her. She was sitting alone, and he sat beside her.

She began the conversation. ‘I guessed you would come to me, and so I came here. I see that I was right.’

‘You know for what reason I have come,’ said Struan.

‘Of course I know,’ she said. ‘You have come to plead for your brother.’

‘It is so.’

‘Will you tell me this, sir, as a gentleman? Was there any arrangement between Lord and Lady Longmynd that you should meet me here?’

‘Madam, there was.’

‘Then there are two more in the plot against me whom I thought to be friends. I shall suspect Lady Alice and Lady Made-

leine next. I am to have no peace in this world, it would seem.'

'Madam, would you not have peace with your husband?'

'What right have you, Mr. Struan, to speak to me of my husband in the way you do? What has he paid you, or what has he done for you, that you should come to me eternally as his special pleader? Come, Mr. Struan, let us be friends: many things have passed between us which are not known to Lady Madeleine or Lady Alice, or even Father Wilson. You have beset me in my country walks, until I discontinued them. Why have you done this?'

'Why? I only pleaded for my brother.'

'I will have the whole thing out now, root and branch,' she said, with a courage which astonished herself. 'You pleaded so

well for your brother, that I began to fear you were pleading for yourself.'

'Has that distressed you?' said Struan slowly.

His arrow went home to the feather. What to say the poor creature knew not, for she was without guidance, and without guidance she was nought. There was a poor bauble of a cross, least and yet most valuable of all her ornaments, still hanging about her neck. She clasped it and bent her head over it.

Whether she prayed or not, I cannot say, but as she clasped the cross she suddenly heard the words of old Sister Podagra, given one wet Sunday afternoon, in the old convent at Waterloo.

'And so you see, girls, that God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead for telling a lie.

And it is a mercy that we are not all dead.'

The rough words came back to her, and guided her, poor as they were. With her curious bringing up, this recollection—it was nothing more—came to her like a revelation, and she took it to be such. She answered firmly,

'It has not distressed me. I wish that it had.'

'Do you mean that if I were to plead for myself, and not for Lionel, that you would listen to me? Speak, my own Edith, speak, for my life's happiness depends on your decision.'

So this was the end of the great plot for winning her back. Lady Madeleine and Lady Alice were making pickles. Father Wilson was writing a rather acrimonious letter to the Pope about the canonisation of

the Japanese martyrs. Lionel, where was he? And this poor Edith was left all alone to sink or swim as she might, without hope or help, save in the poor little cross which she held in her hand with such force that she broke it.

She had got to love Struan—more deeply than she had ever loved Lionel. She knew it well; and she had feared that he knew it. Struan had met her very often in her walks at Weston, pleading for Lionel; only too well. Now the truth was out: he loved her, and she loved him.

He spoke first. ‘Edith,’ he said, ‘say something to me, and let me know my fate.’

The little cross was broken in her hands, and the splinters gave her pain; so she opened her hand and looked on it. It was the supreme moment of her life, as the reader will see hereafter; and there was

nothing to help her except her old religion. She said, very loudly, ‘Holy Mary, mother of God, guide me!’ and if she had looked at Struan she would have seen a flash of light in his eyes, which might be from hell or heaven. He knew that he was baffled, but he said to her,

‘You may struggle against fate, but you will be mine yet in spite of your religion. You are doomed, Edith—you are doomed.’

‘You hear me, sir—false friend, false brother, false lover : I did *like* you, and I like you still if it mattered ; but leave me, and never come near me again. You have betrayed your brother and my husband, in your attempt to betray me. Nothing shall induce me to speak to you again. I deeply regret that I have been deceived into caring for—yes, sir, make the most of that—caring for a villain.’

‘You love Lionel still,’ said Struan, turning.

‘That is mean,’ she said, now in furious temper. ‘I have confessed to you that I have a horror of seeing Lionel in his hideous disfigurement, and you have cast that at me. *Lionel* would never have behaved as you have. *He* was a gentleman.’

‘We can at all events say that Lionel’s wife has behaved nobly,’ said Struan, and so he left her.

CHAPTER II.

EDITH'S RESOLVE.

EDITH fled back to Grange Garden the next day. She merely told Lady Madeleine and Lady Alice that she was more sick of the world than ever. They wondered at it when they saw her fine new dress and the other things which she had brought with her; but they took it all as a matter of course and welcomed her.

She said not one word of what had occurred to her in London, though, to tell the truth, Lady Alice was dying to know, and went about her household duties muttering

some very strong expressions about some 'unholy alliance,' as she called it, and uttering aloud remarks anything but complimentary to Ignatius Loyola.

'A precious deal of loyalty there was in him, I'll go bail,' she said to Lady Madeleine. 'He'd have drunk the Pope's health before the King's, I have no doubt. And the founder of the Inquisition, too! Go along with you.'

'My dear, he did not found the Inquisition; he was imprisoned by the Inquisition on a charge of witchcraft,' said Lady Madeleine.

'Well done they,' said Lady Alice; 'I never gave them credit for so much sense. So he was a witch according to your own confession. I have little doubt that Father Wilson is no better with him.'

In short, Lady Alice was not to be argued

with, and ended by saying ‘they were all tarred with the same stick.’

Edith had subsided into the routine of the Grange; but it was obvious that she was very miserable, and went about affairs humbly and diligently, but without any activity. They expected to hear of a proposal for her going back to the convent; but none came: she never mentioned the subject now.

One morning at breakfast there came a letter in a strange hand to Lady Madeleine, which she laid down after she had read it, and then began to cry, to Lady Alice’s infinite consternation and distress.

Lady Madeleine said, ‘George Branscombe has met with a sad accident.’

‘Poor fellow, poor fellow! I am so very sorry. I wish we could do something.’

The letter was from Arthur Branscombe,

announcing George's state. He had delayed very long before he wrote it, for reasons which he has never divulged to the world. Arthur, as the subjoined enclosure will prove, had at a very early age adopted the phonetic system of spelling, which he never after abandoned. Lady Alice read it aloud.

‘Dear Ants,—(‘As if one was an insect,’ said Lady Alice.) I am sorry to inform you that my Bother George (‘True for you,’ said Lady Alice; ‘but you should not cast it up now.’) has met with an Axadent, and I thought that it would please you and Lady Alice to hear of it (‘Sorrow a one of us,’ said Lady Alice.) from me insted (‘That’s the way my brother Cornelius spells it, and he spells potato with the e r at the end; he says that the o was introduced by Cromwell, and it’s odd if an Irish gentleman of his breeding don’t know how to spell his native

language.') of getting vage rumeurs. The fift and six ribs have been fractured, and the fift has severely lasserated the pleura, and we fear penetrated the sellular tissu of the lung. ('Mercy on us with his thieves' Latin,' said Lady Alice. 'Can't he talk about his own brother's body in decent Irish?') If an ignorant practishener had been called in, he would probably have ordered him to be shot at once, I mean would have given up hope, but our Good Doctor won't give up even now. I sent at once to London for the best advice, ('Why didn't the noodle send to Dublin and get a real doctor?' said Lady Alice impatiently.) and Sir Horace Curtis says that he may linger any time, but that if he does get through it he will never be the man he was before. ('That's blessed news, anyhow,' said Lady Alice.) He is very pashent, and

desires your two ladies remembrance, hoping that you'll forget him ('And so it's only the Irish makes bulls, is it?' said Lady Alice.) as he used to be.'

'I see,' concluded Lady Alice, folding up the letter.

'Well now, Madeleine,' said Lady Alice, 'one thing is perfectly clear to me, though I am no kin to him,—that it is I ought to start off directly to him, and not you. I am stronger than you, my poor dear, and more fit to go through with it. It's clear that one of us must go, or those English doctors will be murdering the young man.'

'I ought to go, as his kinswoman,' said Lady Madeleine; and Lady Alice was beginning to argue with her, when Edith, who had not yet spoken, rose.

'Allow me to observe, my dear ladies,'

she said with dignity, ‘that you are neither of you going with my consent. George is nearer to me than he is to either of you, for he is my husband’s brother, therefore mine. I am going to nurse him.’

‘You!’ exclaimed Lady Alice. ‘Edith, you are wholly unfit for it.’

‘Lady Alice,’ she said, few women could be fitter. Shortly after I left the Stephano-canthines, and came back to the old convent, I was detailed for a year to work in the Brussels hospitals as a sister of mercy. Such a course is very frequently taken with sisters of our order who have been married. I fancy that you will find few professed nurses better than myself.’

‘Why, this comes exactly as it should be,’ said Lady Alice.

‘I am sure it does. At work by the sick-bed I shall be as busy and peaceful as I

can be anywhere ; and there is a sanctity in sickness and possible death which is as great a protection as ten feet thick of stone. I saw that for myself during the riots.'

'Go at once, my dear,' said Lady Madeleine ; 'and God go with you.'

'And may He stay with you,' said Edith. 'I have the right to wear a lay sister's dress, and I shall go in that.'

The preparations were very simple, and quickly made. Lady Alice sniffed a little when she saw Edith in her sister's dress of dark violet, with a rosary and cross at her girdle, her hair completely hidden, and a white cloth over her forehead, under her hood. But she said that she was so at home in the dress that it made her feel free and fearless, and indeed she looked so.

Farmer Hicks deponed in the public-house parlour that night that he had seen a

real popish nun, with a hassock such as the rector wore on Sundays, and a rosemary (he meant, possibly, cassock and rosary), leave the Grange Garden in one of Squire Wotherston's carriages. But nobody believed him.

CHAPTER III.

ARTHUR AS NURSE.

AFFAIRS had gone on in a very dull manner at Pollington. Since the time when George had been carried up on the sofa into his brother's bedroom he had never moved, except when the sofa was taken away and he was placed on a small truckle bed at the foot of Arthur's.

He was very patient, and he never complained. When the great London surgeon came down and examined him, he asked him quietly and alone if he was going to die. The great man, no other than the untameable surgeon, said that he could not be sure.

‘I tell you fairly, Mr. Brauscombe,’ he said, ‘that your situation is precarious, and that if I were in your position I should make my will.’

‘I haven’t got anything to leave,’ said George. ‘I gambled it all away, except my watch, and I gave that to my sister, the day she was married.’

‘Ah well, then there is no necessity for you to exert yourself,’ said the doctor.

‘I say, Sir Horace,’ asked George, ‘what happens to you after you *do* die? Do you go to hell?’

‘Some people go to heaven,’ said Sir Horace. ‘Those who repent go to heaven.’

‘I’ve repented,’ said George; ‘but I doubt they wouldn’t have me. And I shouldn’t like it either, I dare say.’ He laid his head down, and said no more.

We read in the ‘Spectator’ the other

day how Mimos, the French performing dog, when his mistress lay dead of starvation in the siege of Paris, brought all his tricks to the dead girl's side and went through them, seeing if that would arouse her. Arthur Branscombe, that lumbering and stupid English mastiff, did very much the same thing by his still living brother George.

‘Keep him amused, sir,’ were Sir Horace’s last words; ‘much depends on that.’ And Arthur, who had a strong sense that he was not at all an amusing person, save when people laughed *at* him, set himself to the task.

It was so strange to him that this should have happened to *George*. If it had happened to himself, he would have thought far less of it; but that George, so full of vivacity and vitality, should be stricken down like this, puzzled him utterly. ‘It wasn’t his turn,

you know,' he said to himself; 'it was mine.' But George must be amused, and Arthur Branscombe buckled to the task.

The first morning, after listening through the watches of the night to George's heavy breathing, he got up very early and came to George's bedside with a pack of cards, proposing *ecarté*; but George would not even play *ecarté*, in which game he knew he must win. And Arthur was very heavy-hearted about it, arguing that George must be worse than they wanted to make him out.

He went out into the stable-yard, and saw to everything in silence, without a remark. The grooms were silent too, wondering to see Arthur so very grave.

The stud-groom found a voice. 'How is Mr. George, sir?' he said.

'I am afraid he's very bad,' said Arthur,

glad to talk to some one. 'He won't play cards with me.'

The stud-groom looked very grave. He argued that Mr. George must be very ill indeed.

'If anything happens to George,' said Arthur, 'I shall lose a true and good friend; the best I ever had. I don't say that he was up to the governor's mark, but he might have been.'

The stud-groom was of the same opinion, inwardly. George Branscombe, he thought, might have developed into exactly such a godless old rascal as his father, had time and money been allowed him. But of this he said nothing.

Arthur went back to George, and carried him breakfast, which George managed to eat.

'You have got to be amused, George,'

he said. 'I wish you would try a game of cribbage.'

'I think I should like that, Arthur,' said George. 'We are a good match, but we need not play for money. Let us play for counters, and you chalk up the score. If it goes against me, I can pay; but don't let us play high. And mind you play your best, or I shall see it, and take no interest in it.'

So Arthur sat by him and played cribbage all the morning; and they talked about the horses, and possibly conspired slightly about the sale of some of them. A godless pair? I am not so sure about that; for Arthur was playing cribbage to please his brother, and his brother was refusing to gamble because he knew that Arthur was trying to please him. They were not utterly godless, though the day was unfortunately Sunday.

People can't play cribbage for ever, and George said he would like to read. On being asked what, he mentioned his Bible; I mean *his* Bible—that is to say, Blaine's 'Rural Sports.' Arthur at once volunteered to read it to him.

Arthur's reading aloud was of the Sunday-school kind. When he read to himself he understood the matter in hand; but when he read aloud the whole sense of it left him, and he went on in a steady staccato, pausing sometimes to spell the words so familiar to him in print, but so strange in sound, and making a mess of it—'forelock' for 'fetlock,' as an example.

George saw that he was tiring himself in his good-nature, and said that he would take the book and read himself to sleep. Arthur put it open on his chest.

It was a heavy book, and George gave a

groan. It was evident that he could not support it. Arthur took it away from him, and went out of the room with it. It was a very precious book to Arthur, and he had had it sumptuously bound at some expense; but he simply went away and cut it to pieces, so that George might read it a sheet at a time, without the weight of it on his chest.

When he brought back the first sheet, George pressed the hand which gave it, but said nothing. And so he lay in his little truckle bed, at his brother's feet, reading of sports and pastimes which he knew he never could enjoy in this world or in the next. But it did him good. He rode after foxes in imagination; he shot partridges; he trained horses, and won large sums with them (which he gave always now to Arthur); and went back thirty years to the

time when Arthur taught him to swim. He caught so many trout one morning, that when Arthur came to him, he earnestly desired him to bring him certain drawers from his own room at once.

‘We don’t know what may happen, Arthur,’ he said eagerly; ‘and I should like to tie you a few flies before I go. There is no one in Gloucestershire can tie the real Devon dundrake as I can, and it kills as well here as there.’

CHAPTER IV.

EDITH TAKES UP HER POSITION.

A FLY drove up the avenue at Pollington, and came to the door. No one had noticed it; but the butler, hearing the door-bell rung pretty sharply, came into the hall putting on his coat. To his astonishment he found a religious woman, whom he took to be one of the Little Sisters of the poor, who occasionally came that way, standing in the hall, with two boxes, paying the fly-man deliberately, and giving him a shilling over his fare.

‘Where is your master?’ she asked.
‘Why did you not answer the bell before?’

‘My master is upstairs with Mr. George,’ said the butler.

‘Go and tell him that his sister is here,’ said Edith. ‘Or stay,—what room is he in?’

‘He is with Mr. George in his own bedroom, Miss.’

‘Madam, you mean, I suppose,’ said Edith. ‘I know the room; I will go up there. Leave my boxes here just now, for I do not know which room I shall want. How is Mr. George?’

‘He is much the same, Madam.’

‘Ah!’ she said, and passed up the staircase, pausing half-way up to say to the butler, ‘Tell the housekeeper I shall want her in about ten minutes, will you?’ And then she went up, and seemed to know her way.

Arthur and George were playing dili-

gently at cribbage, George being slightly held up in his bed by pillows, which Arthur had put under him. Arthur had pegged too few holes, and George had appropriated them with great glee. (I believe that is the rule of the game, though I may be in error.) Arthur was considering over the matter when there came a knock at the door.

‘Come in!’ roared Arthur. ‘Is that the beef-tea, old woman?’

‘A letter from Lady Madeleine Howard,’ said a strange voice, through the partly opened door. ‘Come and take it.’

Arthur went to the door, and confronted a nun, as he supposed, which nun said to him,

‘Are not you going to kiss me, Arthur? I am Lionel’s wife, Edith, and Lady Madeleine has sent me to nurse George.’

Arthur stood with the letter in his hand

in a state of collapse. She passed him, and went up to George's bed.

‘Dear George,’ she said, ‘we have been so sorry. Lady Madeleine and Lady Alice were contending which of them should come, but I soon showed them that the right was mine, as you were nearer to me than either of them, and that I was a trained nurse. What were you doing when I came in?’

‘I am afraid that I was playing cards with my brother,’ said George, abashed.

‘Arthur, do come and finish the game with your brother while I see to things. You have never kissed me, so I shall kiss George. George, your head is too high : when you play your cards with Arthur you should have a board to play on. For the life of me, I never could play cards ; we *had* them at the convent in old times, but we used to tell our fortunes on them. Arthur

dear, when you find your brains would you ring for the housekeeper ? ’

Arthur thus appealed to, holding the unopened letter from Lady Madeleine in his hand, looked solemnly round the room twice, and then walked out of the door without saying one single word.

‘ Is he angry, George ? ’ asked Edith, as she re-adjusted his pillows.

‘ Bless you, no,’ said George ; ‘ he will never be angry again in his life. When Struan came, that began to change him ; and when he found out that Cross was a skunk, that changed him more : and now he knows that I am to die he is quite another man.’

‘ You are not going to die, George,’ she said. ‘ Where is your nurse ? I must speak to her. She is a very good one.’

‘ I have none,’ said George. ‘ He has

never allowed a woman in the room. He has done everything himself. Do you say that I am not to die?’

‘I think not,’ she said ; ‘if we can keep you quiet, all will be well yet. I will nurse you carefully, and read to you, and we shall pull through.’

‘I know we shall not,’ said George ; ‘but you make me feel reconciled to it, for all that. Here’s Arthur.’

Arthur had been putting his wits to work and thinking steadily and slowly. The result of his cogitations was that he appeared in the room with a large glass of port wine and a biscuit on a plate. These he offered silently to Edith, who thanked him and took them.

‘This is extremely kind of you,’ he said. ‘I feel it very deeply. I see hope in your face, and begin to feel it myself. We can

make this arrangement, my dear Edith : you take him in the daytime, and I will see to him at night. I have settled your room with the housekeeper : it is close by and you will find her outside.'

On going out she found the housekeeper, and was rather doubtful about her reception, but her fears were soon dispelled.

'Ah, madam !' said the old lady, 'I remember you so well, and I thank Heaven that you have come. Here is a blessed change come over master. It began when Mr. Struan began to come, and it has been going on ever since. I always loved Mr. Arthur since I nursed him, and I was sure there was no real harm in him, and that he would come round,—but Mr. George, that he should change so ; "I am going to die, Mrs. Dickson," he said to me only yesterday, "but don't let Arthur know it ; he will be

so awfully cut up when it does happen that there is no use anticipating." Yes, there is a change here, and all Mr. Struan's doing. Cross would have kept them fighting and bickering for his own purposes—it was Mr. Struan made the peace, blessings on him for it !'

'Does he come much here, then ?' said Edith, greatly surprised.

'Not so much just lately, madam ; he has been twice since Mr. George was hurt, but he seems to have a great deal of business elsewhere just now.'

'If he does come,' thought Edith, ' he will hardly trouble me while I am on my present errand and in this dress.'

So a melancholy quiet peace settled down upon the house, and all the brutal passions which had once disturbed it were

stilled for ever. Struan had begun the work, and Edith had completed it.

Lionel and Struan were together in the chambers at the Albany, which were occupied by one, but very much used by the other. ‘I have got such good news for you, brother,’ said Struan. ‘Edith has gone off to Pollington to nurse George, and Arthur has received her with the greatest affection.’

‘I am glad indeed,’ said Lionel. ‘We shall get some good out of the Grange Garden yet.’

CHAPTER V.

CROSS IN TROUBLE.

LEAVING the quiet house at Pollington, where Edith was completing the work begun by Struan, and awakening the darkened soul of the poor outcast George, teaching him to look on that eternity which seemed so near with an ever-growing hope, we must turn to a very different subject—to that of the murderer Cross, on whom God had set his brand with fearful distinctness.

‘Murder!’—yes. He had contemplated the crime long, and now he had accomplished it. And as his sense told him in

the watches of the night it was no ordinary murder, but one most foul, treacherous, unprovoked, and ungrateful. He whose heart—almost alone among men—had given him love, whose hand had loaded him with favours, was ruthlessly and shamefully assassinated. It would not do to think about it, and yet he could think of little else. Arthur was fully avenged had he cared to know the fact.

One of the crowning horrors of his situation was this—day after day passed and he could gain no tidings of Arthur's death. He had dexterously placed the poison—enough Scheele's prussic acid to kill ten men—in a place where Arthur would certainly find it and use it, the next morning. His theory was this, that Arthur would miss his attar of rose bottle the first morning, and think that George

had borrowed it. George's dressing-case had long been a thing of the past, and George habitually used his brother's; in fact, there had been a few words in old times about one of the gold tops being missing. Missing the bottle, Arthur would go to George's room and ask for it; George would deny having had it, and Arthur, thinking that George was lying, would say no more about it, and go without—probably mentioning his loss to the butler with very uncomplimentary remarks about George. The next morning—so his ghastly sketch went on—Arthur would find that George had replaced it, would curse his brother for a clumsy cheat, and put it to his lips, and then——

He used to try to stop here, but the horror was that he could not; his very medical knowledge assisted in the Nemesis:

he had once seen a man do it, a man who had been ruined, and had, like Londonderry, done it in the presence of his doctor, because apparently he was afraid to do it alone. Cross saw it all before him—the short run, the heavy crashing fall, the quiver of the limbs, and the horrible silence. Cross saw it all happen again a dozen times a day ; but the face which he had turned over and looked into with scientific curiosity was now changed into that of Arthur Branscombe : the dead eyes which had stared so strangely at him were not those of a comparative stranger, but those of his loving and trusting friend.

Did he repent? Not for one instant : the blasphemous sentence which was continually on his lips was ‘I wish to God it was over.’

But days went on, and no news came : he used to be at the newspaper shop the

first thing in the morning to get the 'Times,' and tear it eagerly open, running his fevered eye from column to column to find the intelligence which he knew *must* come, but which never came.

And now a new phase of his hell upon earth began. George, poor fellow, had seen enough of rascality, and heard enough of Cross from some very loose fish of his acquaintance, to suspect him of any villainy; and had, as we have seen before, sketched out Cross's line of action with singular correctness, for he was not deficient in imagination, as his creditors well knew. Cross as nearly as possible carried out this programme, but he got scared by Arthur's waking suddenly (as he thought), and hurried the *finale*, losing his presence of mind so far as to unlock the door from the inside; a thing which he remembered after-

wards. If matters went well now, Arthur would go, and George would almost certainly suffer, but—was it all discovered? Had Arthur seen him take the bottle? Had Arthur found out that he had been in his room again and had replaced it? ‘That way lies madness’ and ruin of all kinds. Yet he could remember nothing in Arthur’s manner when they parted which, in his calmer moments, disquieted him. He could not think it.

During all this agony of anxiety he had to go through the usual routine of his practice, and he had additional causes of worry. He had lost some money, and had had to violate the rights of hospitality so far as to remove some of Arthur’s jewels—the mysterious disappearance of Gabriel into safer quarters giving him an excellent

opportunity for doing so. He now lost more.

One morning his servant came in with a letter—a very short one, which Cross read and threw in the fire. He then said to his servant,

‘You don’t look well this morning, John.’

‘I *feel* quite well, sir,’ said the servant smiling. Indeed he was a picture of good looks, good health, and vivacity, for Cross liked good-looking people about him.

Cross had no more to say, but if that young man had been induced to take physic that morning he would probably have died of decline in three weeks or so, although his lungs were as sound as the best of any of my reader’s. He is a diligent young man, and is now married and keeping a small private hotel, which he started by selling the

policy originally made on his life by Cross. He little dreams how near he was coming to a bad end by the hand of his beloved Doctor, in whom he insists on believing firmly to this day.

For the letter which he had received was of such a nature that the frank trusting face of his servant might have pleaded in vain with him. He was ruined. He went to the city, and saw his old friend Burstenberg. It was all true : Burstenberg himself was hit, but he could stand it.

‘We are in the same boat, my dear Cross,’ he said. ‘We have been in the same boat before,’ he added significantly ; and then used some religious expression which showed Cross that his religion (of which he knew) was Roman Catholic (a thing which surprised him).

What was to be done now ? Although

he had lost every farthing of his savings, five or six hundred pounds would pull him through. There were two things, and two only, to think about. Struan would pay to have Lionel kept quiet—he had admitted that ; that was one thing ; and his servant's life policy was another. The last was extremely dangerous in his present state of nerve ; and, supreme master of drugs as he was, would take time. The former was the quickest and easiest thing.

What saved his servant's life was this singular conduct on the part of that unaccountable being Arthur. The next morning Cross received a letter from the murdered man, giving him a long account of George's accident, with an elaborate diagnosis of it, which made Cross laugh, the first time for a week or so. Arthur's diagnosis was to Cross's scientific eye that of a veteri-

nary surgeon. We will not inflict Arthur's spelling on the reader again.

‘I don't know,’ concluded Arthur, ‘so much about human pathology as you do, but I know a good deal about horse doctoring and dog doctoring. I tell you fairly, my dear Cross, that after I had examined George, I said to myself, “If you were a dog of mine, I should give you a dose of poison.”’

‘Come down and see me: but I tell you one thing, don't go near George: he does not like you, and it would do him no good. When the accident happened I did not know where you were,’ (oh, Arthur! Arthur!) ‘and I sent for Sir Horace Curtis. He is coming again to-morrow. Try to meet him in consultation.’

Sir Horace Curtis was the gentleman whom we have previously called ‘the untameable surgeon.’ Cross telegraphed to

say that he could not possibly come before the day after, and having sent off the telegram sat down to think. The result of his thought was that he sent another telegram, to say that he found that he could be at Pollington by the nine-forty train, and desired Arthur to send the brougham for him.

‘I am half mad,’ he said, ‘to think of funking that old dog. I must meet him boldly. And I must find out the mystery of this break-down. Arthur, my boy, you shan’t escape me twice like this. I cannot understand it. However, I am relieved from the purgatory of the last three weeks. I am as well with you as ever, it seems. I shall have to borrow five hundred pounds of you, my friend, and then we shall be quits.’

CHAPTER VI.

CROSS RETURNS TO POLLINGTON.

As of old, Arthur's brougham met Cross; as of old, Arthur met Cross at the hall door. Arthur said, 'I missed you, Cross; there is no fellow such good company as you. So I sent for you.'

He was telling the actual truth, strange to say. Cross had been his only friend for so many years, that even now, when he knew that the man had made a shameful design against his life, he wanted, as he put it to himself, 'to have another turn with old Cross.' He really was very glad to see him

again. ‘After all,’ said Arthur, ‘it was I put the temptation in his way by telling him about that will. I will treat him as if I knew nothing: it seems a shame to let the old fellow in so, after he has let himself in so deep. But he deserves anything, and I shall have the pleasure of his company.’

‘And how is poor dear George?’ said Cross.

‘I should say that poor dear George was devilish bad,’ replied Arthur. ‘Edith says that he had a little relapse this morning: nothing to signify, only slight.’

‘Edith!’ said Cross; ‘who is she?’

‘She is Lionel’s wife. They didn’t hit it off, those two; and Edith turned monk, or something; and now she is come here to nurse George.’

That Arthur could be purposely stupid,

Cross well knew. He suspected that such was the case now.

‘Then Lionel’s wife is here?’ said Cross.

‘Yes; she watches George all day, and I watch him all night. She is an excellent nurse, but she can’t play cribbage. She reads him holy books, you know; and he seems to like it just as well.’

‘And where is Lionel?’

‘Lionel!’ said George; ‘why, Lionel is in hiding for fear of you.’

‘He had better remain so,’ said Cross.

‘There is Sir Horace Curtis.’

The old man came into the room hurriedly, and confronted Cross.

‘Are you here, Cross?’ he said. ‘That is a godsend. Look here, Cross, I should have been hunting all over London for you this afternoon. I have got a case of incipient tetanus, rapidly growing acute. What

was your treatment in your great case at St. Swithin's? My dear fellow, you know enough about drugs to poison the whole community without detection: do assist a hostile fellow-practitioner to save a human life.'

'I,' said Cross, with dignity, 'had the courage to exhibit Brucine with a boldness which I fear you do not possess. I will write you the prescription if you desire: only if you poison the man, pray say a word for me.'

'Oh, never mind words, Cross,' said Sir Horace. 'We all know that you can kill a man or cure a man as you like. And you have cured more than you have killed—more than most of us can say. Write it out for me while I go in and see this young squire.'

Cross was immensely relieved, though the untameable Sir Horace had been rude

to him. He had received a high compliment; and as for rudeness, Sir Horace was rude to everybody.

‘I am glad to tell you, Mr. Branscombe,’ said Sir Horace, ‘that your brother is going on well. I don’t suppose that he will live very long; but if he is not disturbed he will get about again before he dies. That is a good nurse you have got in there. She knows her work. Catholic?’

‘She is my brother Lionel’s wife,’ said Arthur.

‘Brother Lionel!’ said Sir Horace. ‘I see. Man who fought the duel. Prettiest gun-shot wound you ever saw in your life, Cross. Two molars out and a bit of the jaw-bone as big as your little finger. I used to go down to Grange Garden at Weston to attend him. I tinkered him up pretty well at last. Did he die, Mr. Branscombe?’

‘No,’ said Arthur; ‘he is alive still; but we do not know where he is.’

‘Won’t show, eh? Can quite conceive it. Must have been a handsome fellow. And so that was his wife? Fifty pounds, my dear sir, no; five-and-twenty. Give the other half to Cross for the prescription which he has given me. My dear Cross, if I poison my patient we will be hung together like gentlemen.’ And so the untameable surgeon shook hands with Cross, because he had a high *scientific* opinion of him. He considered that Cross’s manipulation of drugs was second to none in Europe. And as his present patient, with incipient tetanus, had not made a will in Cross’s favour, he felt himself safe.

It may be mentioned that Sir Horace’s important patient with the incipient tetanus, was a very drunken chimney-sweeper, who

had stabbed himself between the finger and thumb with an oyster knife, trying to open the bivalves at two o'clock in the morning. It was all the same to Sir Horace. He was a good case : and as for Cross, Sir Horace considered himself to be in high luck in meeting with him. He exhibited the Brucine, and the man got well. It is possible that he might have got well without it.

But Cross saw from this incident that his reputation in a certain way was higher than ever, and he cursed the day when he attempted the crime which he had against Arthur's life in such a clumsy and hurried way. 'If I had been Palmer himself,' he said, 'I could not have been a greater ass. And I am all in the dark. What the devil has become of that bottle and its contents? I must find out. If not, I must do this; and I am loth to do it, because I cannot

replace it : and might want to shake hands with Gabriel. Bartlett would miss another.'

He was alone now, in his bedroom. He took from a small case an odd-looking thing. There was a brown sac or bag, the size and shape of an almond, fully inflated ; from it went a long, sharp, hollow tooth, ending in a delicate point. He handled the thing carefully, as he had need. In his scientific researches he had assisted at the Zoological Gardens, and he held between his finger and thumb the fang and the poison-gland of the Cobra.

Which meant undetectable death : no one knew that better than Catherine de Medici when she used the fangs of that comparatively harmless yet deadly ophidian, the Cerastes.

CHAPTER VII.

ARTHUR MANAGES CROSS.

‘Do you know a fellow called Roland?’ said Arthur to Cross, at lunch-time, after a considerable silence.

‘I know Sir James Roland.’

‘The man I mean,’ said Arthur, ‘can’t be that man. Though you never know, because Sir Horace Curtis told me that he was a blacksmith’s apprentice, and told me a whole lot about shoeing which I never knew before. He goes against deep paring, same as I do. But the man I mean is a dentist.’

‘No,’ said Cross, ‘I don’t know him.’

‘Because my teeth are going a little, and I am using a preparation of his for them.’

‘You should be very careful what you do use,’ said Cross.

‘But this fellow Roland, he has got authority from the Queen to recommend his stuff. He calls it “Odonto.”’

‘There is no harm in it.’

‘I am glad of that,’ said Arthur, ‘because I have taken to using it lately instead of attar of roses.’

Here was the mystery solved for Cross in an instant. He grew pale, and merely gave a high encomium on that dentifrice, which coming from him might have been useful as an advertisement. He then strolled out into the park, and looked at the deer without seeing them.

So the accursed thing was there still then, in Arthur’s dressing-case, without the

least chance of removing it. Arthur seemed unlikely to use it. Some one else might, however. Who ? The answer suddenly flashed on his brain.

Edith Branscombe, the only woman he had ever loved in his life, whose death could do him no good, and whom he did not hate. The purest episode in his life came back to him on that bright spring morning. He saw that little spot of sunlight shining afar off in the wasted, hideous desert of his life, and for one moment he thought of walking quietly into Arthur's bedroom, seizing the bottle, and doing for himself what he had proposed to do for Arthur, who was at this moment watching him from the window of his bedroom, with Edith.

They saw him start off, at a very swift pace, in the direction of the village, and disappear.

He was back in three-quarters of an hour, and found Arthur getting out his fishing-rod.

‘How is George now?’ he asked.

‘He is the same,’ said Arthur. ‘He wants a trout for his dinner, and I am going to get him one.’

‘I want to tell you,’ said Cross, ‘that you will find it a very good thing to keep his mouth washed with Eau de Cologne; so I have gone to the village and bought him some. Let him use this only, and tell him and Lionel’s wife *never*, on any account, to use attar of roses internally, as you used to do: it irritates the stomach so.’

‘I have some in my dressing-case,’ said Arthur. ‘Edith knows where to find it; but I will tell her not to use it. I am so glad you have brought this, Cross; it will show George that you mean kindly

by him. I never had a gift which I valued more.'

Arthur never took Cross's Eau de Cologne to George, and never mentioned the fact of Cross's having been in the house to him. 'George,' he reflected, 'would only call me a fool.' And possibly George might have been right.

But it was evident to Arthur's mind that Cross had repented of what he meant to do,—that is to say, of his design of murdering him, Arthur. It was plain to Arthur that Cross repented when he brought the bottle of Eau de Cologne, to prevent his using the other scent. Arthur said to himself that this was devilish creditable on Cross's part, to try and repair the ill-considered mischief which he had contemplated; and at last he nearly worked himself round to saying that there were not many fellows in Eng-

land like Cross, in spite of his faults, which were occasional.

Here he fell into a perfect bog and mire of argument with himself, out of which he subsequently emerged, we are happy to say, tolerably clean. All that was apparent to him just now was that old Cross was sorry that he had tried to murder him, and that it was devilish creditable of old Cross.

You say, ‘Was there ever such an utter fool?’ I traverse you by saying that Arthur Branscombe was less of a fool than many men. He had a peculiarly slow way of thinking, but a very sure one. I really must refer to the obsolete Aldrich again, in saying that he argued in an unreasonably long sorites, but that his conclusions were always just. Catch him in the very weakest part of the argument, and he would make a fool of himself in speech, but would not act until he

had argued to the end: save for one man, and that man was at one time Cross. He managed Cross sharply enough now.

He saw that Arthur was very tender with him about the business of the Eau de Cologne. He little thought why; but he was on dangerous ground, and was sure that he must put his foot on the first tussock of grass in the bog which was ready. Arthur's mood might change, and so he made a peculiarly bold and clever stroke.

He went into Arthur's study when he had returned from fishing, and found him at his accounts. He sat down, and said without any preface, for he knew Arthur too well,

‘Arthur, can you lend me five hundred?’

‘No,’ said Arthur at once, ‘I am sure I can’t.’

Cross was beginning to swear to himself, when Arthur went on:

‘Here is the very total,’ he said. ‘I can lend you four hundred and twenty-six pounds five and ninepence. Can you make that do?’

‘I suppose I must,’ said Cross, utterly astonished at his good luck.

‘There will be threepence for the stamp,’ said Arthur, ‘so I will hand you over the cash, short that.’ And Arthur wrote out a receipt, or I O U,—Cross did not see which. ‘Just read and sign that, and the money is ready for you. Sign your name over the stamp.’

Cross read it:

‘I acknowledge the receipt of four hundred and twenty-six pounds, to be repaid in quarterly instalments of twenty-five pounds, not bearing interest, on the condition that I in no way annoy Mr. Lionel Branscombe, either personally or by agent.’

Cross signed without the slightest hesitation, and Arthur handed over Struan's money to the unconscious Cross.

'So you want him left alone, do you, Arthur?' he said.

'Yes, we want him left alone,' said Arthur. 'Here is a ten-pound note lying about; does it belong to you? You had better take it. By-the-bye, I see that it is mine. Take it, and buy yourself something with it.'

This additional act of generosity puzzled him; but all was fish that came to his net. After a very few words he left the room, a made man once more.

He could tide over now, after this unexampled stroke of luck. But still there remained that fearful engine of destruction, which had gone beyond his power. If it got into the hands of Arthur Branscombe, once

more his benefactor and friend, all would go well. Should it get into the hands of any one else, nothing would result except a useless crime.

He was very nervous about meeting Edith Branscombe. He need not have been. Arthur and he were waiting for dinner in the drawing-room, when the door opened and a Sister of Charity came in. Arthur introduced her to Cross as 'Sister Mary,' and they walked into dinner together, she sitting opposite to him.

She was beautiful still, even in that dress ; but she did not seem to know him or remember him in any way. Cross was glad of this. He wished her no harm, and for the sake of old times would have spared her. He determined on a midnight expedition at all risks, for he must go to London the next day.

When the house was quiet, in stockinged feet, he stole up the old staircase, and tried one disused door which led to Arthur's bedroom. He had no need to use his key, for it was ajar. He did not know that since George's illness it had been used by the servants at Arthur's direction, to bring his food by a shorter way from the kitchen, so that he might have it warm; nor did he know that Edith slept in the room immediately on the right of it, and that it was left ajar so that she might be summoned in a moment. George of course would have objected to this arrangement had he dreamt that Arthur, after what he knew, would ever be so incredibly weak as to let Cross into the house again. Edith knew nothing of later matters, and only thought Cross a bad fellow, to be treated with civility as dangerous. *She tried not to remember.*

Cross could see into the room. George was asleep, but Arthur, with the peculiar diligence of idle men, was sitting in his shirt and trowsers before the fire mending a landing net, a thing which every real fisherman knows, is a peculiarly difficult and lengthy process if done properly. Arthur had slept much that day, as Cross knew, and was utterly unlikely to go to bed before his task was finished. It was evident that nothing could be done that night.

Still he watched his victim, safe enough just now, with curiosity. Arthur sat with his shirt open, and his broad white chest exposed; he missed a stitch, and had to begin all over again. Cross thought that he would have sworn; but no, he sat perfectly silent, thinking how to put it right, so silent that Cross almost thought he could hear the beating of that heart which he meant soon to still for ever.

‘This is fortune indeed,’ he said to himself. ‘Once get a sleeping potion between your teeth, my friend Arthur, and all is easy: there will be silence in this room in a week I fancy. I *could* call you away by telegram, but I am surer of you here.’

At this moment George awoke and coughed; Arthur was at his side in a moment.

‘Are you watching still, Arthur?’ said George; ‘you will be ill, old fellow.’

‘I have been sleeping a good part of the day, and I am as wide awake as’—here there was a long pause for a simile, and another attempt—‘as—pickled pork.’

If you had given him time he would have said what he meant, but he did not think it brotherly to keep George waiting, and so he said the first thing he thought of, which happened to be the above.

‘I wish you would read a very little to me, Arthur,’ said George; ‘I have been dreaming about it.’

Arthur had not the remotest objection to read to his brother through the watches of the night, to any extent. The dissevered Blaine was lying about, and he thought that an hour or so with that admirable author on the subject of fishing, or veterinary science would be very agreeable. But George did not want Blaine, he pointed to a book on the little table by his side.

‘Read that which she marked,’ said George, ‘if you please, old fellow. It is not long.’

Arthur took the book, and found the place. It was very obvious that he had never seen the book before, because he run his finger along the first paragraph and spelt it carefully out. Then he began in a loud

and sonorous voice, evidently, from his tone, not understanding what he was reading,

‘Then there came in one who had not on a wedding garment.’

‘Why I’ll be hung,’ said Cross, ‘if he is not reading the *Bible* to him. This is the very devil.’

And so he went away. But Arthur Branscombe sat reading the Bible to his brother for an hour. Arthur was a very long time about it, because he had to spell every verse through before he trusted himself to read it aloud. He had not the wildest idea what it was all about, but it pleased George, and that was enough for him. He hammered on like a donkey dragging stones, in a perfectly mechanical manner. One of the marked passages was that in the Revelations about the man on a white horse. Arthur said that it was a

colour he had never gone in for, mentioning his reasons at very considerable length : further than that Arthur made no commentary.

However, Cross was safe for the present. He could come into that room at any moment, and he determined that Arthur's time should be short. Some infernal scoundrel he argued, now that Arthur had taken to reading the Bible to George, might come to him and ask as Paul did of the Eunuch of Cundace, 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' In which case Cross rightly judged that his power would vanish. He did not know that it was already gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGE'S OPINIONS.

To nine people out of ten George would have seemed to be the most unpromising of the two brothers. It is possible still that he was so. Yet a change took place in him which never took place in Arthur.

Arthur was not sharp like George, but he would never act on evidence until he had thought a thing out in his way. The evidences of Christianity make a very long and very difficult brief for any man, and therefore, with Arthur's style of thinking, it is possible that he might have joined some

form of Christianity early in the next century, if he did not repudiate it altogether, and if he lived.

With George it was utterly different. George had been accustomed to believe at a very early age. Arthur never believed in anyone except Cross. George had believed in everybody, until he was ruined, then he began all over again, to believe in the honour of wretched gamblers who professed themselves to be his friends. Why should one go on to analyse the character of a poor ruined rascal like George? One sees him every day; the most cunning, the most unscrupulous, and the most credulous of men, you might be inclined to say. He, however, is still worth talking about, though he was a great scamp: and we must say a few words about him.

He loved life, and he wished to live.

Then Sir Horace Curtis came to him and told him that he could not live long, and could not certainly enjoy the pleasures of life any more. He was as much ordered for execution as the worst murderer who ever was hung. George did not curse and rave, but took his doom with great pluck. ‘After all,’ he said, ‘it is only extinction; and I deserve it, for I haven’t been a good brother to Arthur, and he has been a devilish good brother to me. For my part I could sooner go to Hell than become extinct, as Cross says we all shall. Yet, although God Almighty has a perfect right to send us to Hell, He surely is unjust to destroy us utterly. He is not a good God but a cruel one if He does that. I can’t resist Him, I know that, but even if He would give me life in Hell I could bear. He is surely not a coward to destroy me.’

When men get into this phase of antagonism to the Deity, they are not far from a compromise, more or less superstitious, in ratio to their previous ignorance. George was saved from this. There came to him Edith, who was at this time, together with the Lady Superior and the Archbishop (that I should say so—they have had their warning and are sound Ultramontanes now), on the very verge of Jansenism ; and she told him the whole mystic story.

He believed it with rapidity and without examination. I am sorry to say that one of the first reasons of his belief was that he had heard Cross say that the whole thing was an infernal lie ; therefore, he argued, it must be true. But the beauty of the story pleased him ; and Edith's eyes were so frank and brave when she told it to him, that he could not but believe.

‘And so he actually died for us all, Same as I would die for Arthur, now he is so kind to me.’

‘Yes,’ said Edith, ‘and his Mother ——

‘Never mind that just now,’ said George Branscombe. ‘I want to know more about Him.’

‘I say, Edith,’ he said, once trying to turn with a groan, ‘read that again about Jairus’ daughter.’ She did so.

‘If she was dead, why did He bring her back again?’ said George. ‘You say that the dead are happy. And that young man at Nain too, and Lazarus. Why did He bring them back?’

‘They had more work to do,’ said Edith, who did not exactly know what to say

‘Edith,’ said George earnestly, ‘do you believe that Arthur will go to Hell?’

‘Oh surely no,’ said Edith.

‘There are many worse fellows than Arthur,’ said George petulantly : ‘and he has no right to go to the same place as Cross. How kind you are to me. I know that it is only your imitation of Jesus Christ that makes you so ; but I thank you all the same.’

Edith bent down and kissed him. ‘George,’ she said, ‘I have got to love you for your own sake. What I do for you has no religious merit.’

George replied in a low voice, ‘I shall have to confess everything, you say. Does it matter whether I do it here or there?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Edith. ‘I am sure George that you will find mercy.’ And we can only hope that he may, for he needs it.

Edith was rather abroad, for she had at this time no spiritual director. She and George, however, read the Douay Bible together very much, and George liked it better at times than anything else. Consequently the astonished Cross found Arthur reading it to George, without its producing the smallest effect on Arthur in any way whatever.

George had a strange fancy for the 'Revelations,' why or how, we do not know. Possibly there was some latent lurid genius in the man which was never developed. He got Arthur to read it to him, and Arthur did so patiently. He never understood a word of it, and came to the conclusion that St. John was not a practical man, and also that the New Jerusalem must have cost a deal of money. What to the Chris-

tian and the critic alike is an incomparably magnificent writing was to him a mere record of strange and incomprehensible proceedings.

CHAPTER IX.

ARTHUR FINDS HIMSELF TREATED WITH
SINGULAR CONFIDENCE.

‘STRUAN is coming to-day,’ said Arthur abruptly to Edith one morning; ‘you don’t know him, I think.’

‘How did *you* come to know him?’ asked Edith.

‘He is here a great deal,’ said Arthur. ‘He rents my shooting, and he boards here when he comes. Do you know him, then?’

‘I know him very well, but I do not care to meet him.’

‘You will find him a charming fellow,’ said Arthur. ‘He made it all right between

George and I. We have been much better since he came. Cross always managed to set us quarrelling, when he seemed to be making the peace ; but Struan, he made us agree, he showed us the best side of one another, and pointed out that we must live together, that I was too stupidly careless with my tongue and that George was too hasty. We attended to him because he had money at first, but when we left off quarrelling we found that we had lived together so long that we could not do without one another, and we had so much in common that we got fond of one another. Mind I always did like George, though I used to swear at him, but he did not like me till Struan came ; and that is not surprising because nobody ever did like me ; you know, they couldn't. *You* didn't like me, and you called me a disreputable blackguard. That

was true at the time, and I meant to shut you up, but I couldn't think of what to say till after you were gone, and I have forgotten it now.'

'Pray don't try to remember,' said Edith, who knew enough of him to see that if he did try he would be without reasonable conversation for the next three hours. 'I want to warn you against Doctor Cross. He is a most dangerous person.'

'Old Cross,' said Arthur; 'I know more about him than you do. What do *you* make out is the matter with him?'

'I fear that he is a great villain, Arthur. I fear that he made all the mischief between Lionel and myself, and I have every reason to believe that he is now preventing Lionel's return to the world.'

'I have stopped that,' said Arthur decisively. 'I have bought him off.'

‘That is brave and good of you,’ said Edith.

Arthur sometimes came down on you like a sledge hammer ; he did so now.

‘If Lionel was to come back to the world would you go to him?’

‘Arthur,’ she said, ‘never ask me that question again. I will answer it once for all. I cannot.’

‘I am sorry for that ; they say he is terribly disfigured and never can show any more. It is a pity because he has been the making of our brother-in-law Wotherston. He does his politics for him.’

‘Now Arthur I am going to ask you something. Do you trust Mr. Struan?’

‘Most entirely,’ said Arthur ; ‘he comes down with his money like a brick.’

This was not what Edith meant by any

means. She sat beside Arthur and took his hand in hers.

‘Dear Arthur,’ she said, ‘I do not wish to make you suspicious of him. I really do believe he is a good man. I believe that he has only committed one great error in a moment of passion. But he is not true to Lionel.’

‘There you are mistaken,’ said Arthur. ‘He is Lionel’s best friend, and I could prove it to you in an instant if I violated his confidence.’

‘Arthur,’ she said, ‘you do not know what men can be when women are concerned, even when it is an old woman like myself.’

Arthur made a longer pause even than usual, but he looked at her after a time and said,

‘Do you mean that Struan has ever said anything to you?’

‘Yes; I wear this dress as a protection against him.’

‘I never could have believed it,’ said Arthur. ‘Yet I don’t know, I have seen men do strange things. It is awkward his coming here; you will not quarrel with him?’

‘I think that I shall not see much of him,’ said Edith, ‘and he can’t say a word to a nun you know,’ she added gaily.

‘I have known fellows who would make love to the Pope,’ said Arthur; ‘I mean to an Abbess’ (and he most likely spoke the truth); ‘but he shan’t annoy you. You see, Edith, you are so very handsome that perhaps he couldn’t help it.’

‘Now Arthur, I want you to carry your mind back for some years. You remember our father and mother?’

‘The Governor and my mother? Of course I do,’ he replied. ‘They did not hit it off you know. Sometimes she would call him every name she could lay her tongue to; and when she had done the dear old Governor used to pitch into *me* with a stick, or an umbrella, or a newspaper, or whatever came handy, it was all one to him, but I liked the newspaper best. George always used to cut and run directly a row began, but I used to take too long thinking about it and got caught. George was always smarter than I was, was old George. Yes, I remember my father and mother very well.’

‘When your mother died, was there nobody brought into the house.’

‘No.’

‘Think again: was there no one to whom you and George objected?’

‘Yes; I remember. There was a boy

we thought too nearly related to us, and we made the place too warm for him. I am sorry to say, Edith that there were several others to whom the same objection extended. You have brought up this subject, Edith, and I wish you had not. I have a great respect for the memory of my father, and I don't like to talk about it. Perhaps you will understand me when I say that George and I fought the governor about this boy, and he never tried it again.'

'Do you remember his name?' said Edith.

'Jane Levery,' said Arthur, promptly. 'No, that was another one, and she married the baker at Newton, and sent me a black and tan terrier every year when they emigrated. I mean she sent me a black and tan terrier one year, and a bottle of cowslip wine all the other years. No, I re-

member now. The lad's name was Robert Struan.'

'Is the name familiar to you lately?' said Edith.

'Why of course it is,' said Arthur, opening his eyes very wide. 'It is the same name as Struan's.'

'And Struan is the man,' she said, rising.

Arthur went to the window, and returned in a shorter space of time than could have been reasonably expected from him. Edith wondered what he would say. She was not long in doubt.

'And so THAT is the reason that he knew his way to the Red room. I never was so puzzled in my life. "We are going wrong," he said, "Mr. Branscombe," when I thought that he had never been in the house before. And I couldn't make it out, and woke Cross

—and Cross swore. I see it all now. Of course it is Robert Struan. What an ass I must have been not to see it !’

‘Do you think, Arthur, that you need let him know that you recognise him now?’

‘What do you think?’ said Arthur.

‘I should say not,’ said Edith.

Arthur, like some statesmen, was extremely prompt at accepting negative advice. *He* had a holy horror of doing anything; he considered that things ought to do themselves, without any assistance on the part of him, Arthur Branscombe. So he always voted straight Tory, until the Tories deceived him by their Reform Bill. Since that event he has never voted. ‘Colonel Sibthorp has no confidence in either party.’ And Wotherston thinks that Arthur, if he is left alone, may possibly vote Whig in the next century.

Edith's negative advice was, however, promptly followed. She advised him not to do anything, and he did it with amazing ability and diligence. When Struan arrived Arthur was so ostentatiously unconscious, that Struan saw Arthur was in possession of more facts than he chose to speak about.

‘But it does not matter,’ said Struan to himself. ‘We will clear everything up. Lionel’s wife is here, is she not?’ he added, aloud.

‘She is here,’ said Arthur.

‘Send up and tell her that Mr. Struan wants to speak to her, will you?’ he said. ‘Go away, please, and leave us alone.’

Arthur obeyed him.

CHAPTER X.

STRUAN AND EDITH.

STRUAN stood in the window, looking out into the deer park, and thinking of many things, when he became aware that a woman was in the room, and was approaching him. He still looked away and said nothing.

At last a hand was laid on his arm, and a voice which made every nerve in his body tremble, said,

‘ You sent for me, and I am here.’

He turned on her coldly, as she thought. ‘ Mrs. Branscombe,’ he said, ‘ I asked Arthur to let me meet you again. My object was

to apologise for something I said to you the other day, and to ask your forgiveness. You know, Edith, that I love you, and I know that I am not utterly indifferent to you. That is acknowledged on both sides. The words have been spoken.'

'I am afraid that it is the case,' said Edith. 'Were it not so I should not be in this prohibitory dress. But surely we have understood one another before. Let us make an end of such a false position for ever. Come, Mr. Struan, let us be friends, and good friends if you choose, but let us talk no more of love.'

'I will not do so,' said Struan. 'Have you forgiven me the mad words I said the other day?'

'Yes,' said Edith. 'I have laid my ruined heart bare before you, and you know all. You have behaved very badly to poor

Lionel: you came in his name, and you betrayed him.'

'Edith, are we to part for ever?' he asked, sadly.

'This dress proves it,' replied Edith, steadfastly.

'But may I—may I—not have one kiss?' pleaded Struan, tremulously.

'Certainly not,' said Edith, with decision. 'I have been betrayed by you into a great folly, and you ought to be generous enough to see it, and not press me further. If you are not, I must, at this moment, bid you good-bye for ever.'

'Will you let me kiss your hand?' he asked, gently.

'No,' said Edith, firmly. 'I repeat that you have betrayed your friend Lionel. Now listen to me,' she continued, 'I can say anything in this nun's dress. I give you

your viaticum. You love me, and you have extorted the fact from me that you are not indifferent to me. But you have grievously insulted me, and I avenge it. Go away from me, eat your heart out, and I will eat out mine. May you find comfort in religion as I have done : have you any religion ? ’

‘ Yes, I am a Catholic, but too careless a one I fear, and therefore I should be glad of instruction.’

‘ From me I suppose.’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Then you shall have it,’ she said. ‘ You have committed a dishonourable error, and you must undergo penance for it. I enjoin you never to speak to me again.’

‘ That is too hard. I cannot bear that. Reconsider it, Edith.’

‘ Well,’ she said, ‘ I will thus far : you

shall never speak to me save on the subjects of religion and of my patient.'

'I agree to that,' said Struan, 'I wish to speak about George now and of your beautiful devotion to him; you have come here like an angel in the house. I am glad that you put on that dress, because the sight of it will bring some thoughts of a holy and higher life to the poor fellow, and you look more lovely in it than you did in your secular dress.'

Edith was angry. 'That is very mean,' she said, 'and contrary to our compact.'

'I have not broken our compact, I was only talking about George.'

'That is untrue,' she said, and turned to leave the room; but he detained her, saying,

'Come, we will not quarrel again, and we shall not, if you will not be too sensitive.

We need be nothing to one another except

friends in future. I want your advice about this household, for I have gained a power here which I wish to use wisely.'

Edith sat down and began talking to him. There was something in Struan's tone and manner when he spoke last, which put her completely at ease. Some women will forgive much,—few are indisposed to pardon devotion to themselves—and she had forgiven him. She knew that the ordeal had passed and that he would not subject her to a further trial.

'You have behaved very badly,' she said; 'but I want a friend, and so if you will ignore the past, I will make a friend of you. Will you promise to forget the past?'

'No,' said Struan, 'I cannot do that. It is impossible; but I will as you suggest, ignore it, and we may be to each other as if it had never been. You, Edith, have

behaved so well in this unhappy matter, that I will do this: I will swear on the faith of a Christian, and the honour of a gentleman, that the next advances other than those of sincere friendship, shall come from you and not from me. And if they come from you, they will be reciprocated as you know.'

'I am safe now,' she replied, cheerfully; 'I agree. You came out of this misunderstanding well.'

'We will seal the compact then with a brother's kiss on your forehead.'

And he did so. She felt that it was not a *brother's kiss* and blushed; but it was the first and the last. And blundering Arthur's remark came into her mind, 'perhaps, he couldn't help it.' Perhaps he could not.

'Now sister Mary,' said Struan, with an

air of businesslike indifference, 'how is your patient?'

'I tell you frankly, brother Robert, that I fear it is only a matter of time with George.'

'Sir Horace Curtis told me the same thing the other day,' said Struan.

'Oh, you know him then?'

'Know Sir Horace! of course I do. Yes—don't you see he attends Lionel. But I mean how is George going on morally? I tell you sister Mary what my position is here: I am rich, not so rich as some suppose, but still rich: and I was a sojourner in strange lands.'

'And when you came back you remembered your brothers and your old home?'

'Yes, sister, just as you have done.'

'It was good of you. For your brothers

were very cruel to you, and made your home miserable.'

'You mean my two elder brothers. Yes, they did. But family ties are not easily broken in the case of some people. I am one of them. When I came back I found out all about my brothers, about George's ruin, about the very disreputable life they were leading, how the country people disliked George to see them, and how Arthur and George had got such a name in the way of horse dealing, that it was a wonder Arthur was not removed from the bench. I made it my duty to see if I could put things right. I found Arthur advertising in the 'Athenæum' the sale of some pictures, and I made that fact my opportunity to gain access to and power in the house.

'Well, from the first I had hopes. I saw

in the darkened soul of Arthur, a power of love, for which I had not been prepared. Do you know how it showed itself?'

'I cannot tell, but please go on. You tell your story well.'

Rather too well for her peace of mind possibly.

'Well, Arthur first showed me the better side of his character in his persistent vindication of his late father. As Mr. Branscombe was my father also I must not say too much about him. Do you remember him?'

'I cannot.'

'Believe then that he was very much the contrary of the man Arthur represents him to be, and you will gain some idea of him. He was singularly cruel to Arthur, because Arthur was too slow and apparently stupid to resist. George, on the other hand, he was a little afraid of. I fear that Mr. Brans-

combe's only good quality was generosity; in that matter even I have no right to complain. Now when I came back I found that Arthur had by some process of reasoning peculiar to himself, made out this man to be a sort of demigod. I smiled, but I could not laugh. Do you understand me, when I say that there was something holy about it?'

'I understand.'

'I frankly confess that I took to poor Arthur at once, and he took to me. I was rather in terror of personal recognition, but I was speedily reassured on that point. I made the mistake of giving the name of Robert Struan, but I was utterly forgotten in the course of years.'

Thought Edith, 'Shall I tell him that Arthur knows?' And the answer was 'No.'

'By using money I gained influence over both Arthur and George. Arthur I found

not to be naturally bad but a simple barbarous heathen. George was much more difficult; he was extremely clever, godless and virtuous in some ways, I mean that he had no vices to which I could pander for influence had I been base enough to do so; a very difficult man to manage indeed. The thin end of the wedge with him was ample cash, and I supplied it. I don't really think that he has made a bad use of it lately.

‘But I found an antagonistic power in this house, which at first was stronger than my own. The influence—it was that of Doctor Cross. I discovered through George, my dear sister, that he held, and still holds, a power over Arthur. I do not know what it is, nor I fancy does George himself. If he does he will not tell me. Do you?’

‘I do not.’

‘Well, Cross has a singular power over

Arthur. But to go on. I fancy my power is greater than that of Cross. Now tell me about George.'

'Stay,' said Edith, 'I wish to tell you about Cross. I believe that he was the man who made all the mischief between Lionel and myself.'

'Then why do you not say so?' said Struan.

'I have no proofs, everything was too cleverly managed, and my mind is all abroad when I revert to the facts. Believing Lionel innocent in every way, yet I am too weak to fight the man and his agents alone.'

'We may find you assistance,' said Struan, 'or we may be able to do without you at all. Look here, sister Mary, and attend to me carefully. We thought that we had utterly checkmated Cross: we think

that all is fair with such a man. To me, in the presence of witnesses, concealed witnesses I will allow, he promised to leave Lionel alone for a sum of money. He is at present in need, and has signed a document promising all we wanted.'

'The production of which would be professional ruin to him,' said Edith.

'About even that I am now uncertain,' said Struan. 'Cross's scientific reputation is so deservedly high, and his practice lies among such very queer people, that he might live even that down. I only know now that he has a card to play against Arthur, which, if he is offended, he will hold over his head for the purpose of extorting money from him, a thing which I know he is quite capable of doing. So you see, so far from having checkmated him, we have only succeeded in a bad stale-mate,

because Arthur has behaved so well that we cannot desert him. We have a clever, active, and unscrupulous foe to deal with, and we must have your assistance.'

'Of course I give it, such as it is,' said Edith.

'I will tell you one thing now of a more delicate nature. Are you aware that he or some other scoundrel made Lionel doubt *you?*'

'Doubt me!'

'Yes; made him suspect you of being attached to a young Pole.'

'Don't name him. No, I never guessed that. Lionel must have been mad.'

'He was,' said Struan.

'Tell him this,' Edith answered, 'That when I am gone back home, he must come to me, and, from behind the grille which separates me from the world, I will prove

my utter innocence to him. No ' she added, rising passionately, ' take me to him at once, I will not wait, ruined as he is, betrayed as I have been, I will overcome my terror and see him face to face. I will tell him everything—yes, *everything*, even what has passed between me and you. I am innocent, and therefore I do not fear to meet him. I demand of you, sir, to tell me where Lionel is, that I may go on my knees before him, to give him my forgiveness and to ask his.'

'There is no need for such a course, Edith,' said Struan. 'Dr. Cross has fully exonerated you, and Lionel knows his folly now. You must make up your mind to see Lionel sooner or later, before your retirement from the world; but those who are wise in these matters, or are supposed to be, say not yet; in that I think them foolish, but I have pledged my word not to urge

anything against their plans until both Lionel and Arthur are safe. Neither of them is so yet. We have had a long, and I fear to you tiring interview ; now let me go to your patient.'

Edith, greatly moved by the strange things she had heard, buried her face in her hands. When she looked up, Struan was gone.

'Robert ! Lionel !' she whispered, pressing her hand upon her heart, 'why am I tried so ? It is too much. Holy Mary, Mother of God, help me now as at the hour of my death.'

CHAPTER XI.

GEORGE WONDERS WHAT ARTHUR WILL DO
WITHOUT HIM.

GEORGE lay on a bed which had been moved for him by Arthur to the window. He could look out on the court-yard and see the horses. Struan came into the room and went up to him from behind and whispered in his ear,

‘I am come to see you, George,’ he said. ‘Remember that walls have ears, and so do not mention my christian name. Remember that Arthur knows nothing.’

‘Robert,’ George replied, in a very low

voice, 'I understand you. I will only say your name in a whisper.'

'I see you understand,' said Struan, 'but you are feverish and ill. Has anything vexed you?'

'Robert, I am not strong enough to call out of the window. There is my poor fool of a brother having that horse set to by James. Tell him that the horse is in Jacob's hands.'

Struan did so, and Arthur stopped the proceedings and waited until Jacob came. Jacob swore at James before Arthur, he put the horse into the 'Oberon' or 'torpedo' brougham, and drove it round and round the ring several times, while Arthur stood in the middle of the ring like the ecuyer in a circus. Then the gate was opened, and Jacob, sitting tight, drove out into the park. Arthur ran out to see the effect, followed by

all the grooms and stable helpers. They none of them paused at the gate but ran on : it was obvious that the horse and Jacob were distinguishing themselves.

This was maddening to George.

‘Run to the upper window, Robert,’ he said, ‘and see what has happened.’

Struan did so. He saw the horse, with the ‘Oberon’ brougham behind him, careering over the deer park, in very much the same line which the fox hounds had taken the winter before. Jacob was standing up without a whip, and driving hatless, with the whole of Arthur Branscombe’s horse-breeding establishment, headed by Arthur himself, streaming after him. Jacob avoided several ‘*metæ*’ with his ‘*rotis fervidis*,’ who in the shape of beech trees, elm trees, oak trees, sheep, highland cattle deer, and an aged American bison with a

hide like a doormat, which Arthur had bought at Bristol very cheap, for what reason he has totally forgotten. In the end, however, Jacob steered the horse and brougham into the upper, or as he would have said 'stodgy' end of a fish-pond, and bogged his horse splendidly. Having seen Jacob win the blue riband of driving, and that no one was hurt, Struan returned to George and told him that nothing had happened except that Jacob had found it necessary to make a light cavalry charge into the fish-pond.

'Arthur will be entire hours before he comes back,' said George. 'I want to talk to you. This establishment will go to the devil when I am dead.'

'That will be a long time first, I hope, George.'

'Why no,' said George. 'I know that

you mean kindly, and I take it so. But don't say it again. I am going to die, brother.'

'I don't believe it, George.'

'Well, we won't dispute; I don't care to live. I could not enjoy life. If I were to get well enough to creep about I should be no use to Arthur. I have told that lad Jacob honestly everything I knew, and you see what he does with it: he has no powers of administration. Do you think *I* would ever have let that horse feel the turf under his feet? Why was the horse tried in the park? Jacob is a fool.'

'He has not your nerve,' said Struan.

'Perhaps not. I have been a sober and virtuous man, though Edith won't count that. In fact she won't count good works at all, which puzzles me, because she is a Catholic. She says I am to make a confession, and I want to confess to you.'

‘You should do so to a priest,’ said Struan. ‘They are the arbitrators. If you have any doubts you should go to the clergyman and see if he can help you. Read the liturgy of the English Church.’

‘I am past that. I want to confess two things to you, because you have been very kind to me.’

‘What are they?’

‘I have concealed two things from you —two things which you ought to know, and yet which I am bound in honour not to reveal. I should be betraying Arthur if I did. And you would not have me do that.’

‘George,’ said Struan, eagerly, ‘say no other word. You must not betray Arthur, even to me.’

‘I will not. But I must and will tell you this. Arthur and I know enough to *hang* Cross. But Arthur’s feeling for Cross

is so strong that if I were to swear against him he would swear for him against me.'

'So I feared. My dear George, we must wait for some accident which will open even Arthur's eyes. I feel that it will come.'

Another came indeed, and was not neglected.

'Now George, my boy,' said Struan, 'let us have a good talk—a comfortable talk.' And so he gently propped up George with pillows, and sat beside him.

'What can I do for you?' he inquired.

'Give me a new lease of life, Robert,' said George, smiling faintly.

'I hope you will have that, George. What next?'

'Give Edith a new lease of life, for she has been kind to me.'

'If she shows any sense she will have it,' said Struan. 'What next?'

‘I hardly know. Edith says that I ought to do good works, but how can I do good works in bed? And she says that I ought to have masses said for different people, and I haven’t got any money to pay for them.’

‘That difficulty might be got over, George. Do you want anything else?’

‘I wish you would tell me this—is God going to turn me into Hell for ever? or is He only going to blow me out like a candle, and make an end of me?’

‘Confusion take people who ask such questions as these,’ thought Struan to himself. ‘Why can’t they wait and see? In a very short time everyone will know the truth.’

But he said—‘There is Heaven, George,’ not knowing what else to say.

And George replied: ‘I should never show my face *there*. I have enough of the feelings of a gentleman left to prevent my

doing *that*. Why you would not speak to me if you met me there.'

Struan walked up and down the room thinking. And he said to himself: 'In a case of hopeless heathenism like this, it is better that the man should accept every superstition of Rome, and die happy with extreme unction.'

Whereby it will be seen that Struan, Catholic though he was, had by no means a settled belief.

'We may have a chance of talking more on these subjects,' he said. 'My dear brother, be silent now, and listen to Edith about them. Here comes Arthur.'

'I am afraid he will be angry about his old brougham,' said George, and composed himself to sleep as a precautionary measure.

Arthur, however, was radiant: his horse had been rescued from the quagmire

at the head of the fish-pond, and the brougham was nearly intact, though still embedded. Arthur was plastered with mud, but in high spirits; he had got an idea in his head. Some of the Royal Engineers were working close by on the Ordnance Survey. Arthur argued that he, as a deputy lieutenant for the county, had a right to their services to get his brougham out of the fish-pond: otherwise, he said, what was the use of them? Struan pointed out to him that imperial troops could only act by the consent of the civil power. Whereby Arthur determined, as a magistrate, to have the engineers down next day, read the Riot Act, and then and there request them on their allegiance to fish his carriage out of the mud. Theoretically and constitutionally we believe that he was perfectly right.

Struan went away, and Arthur, at once grown serious, asked George affectionately :

‘What have you told him?’

‘Nothing new,’ said George; ‘I have kept my promise to you.’

‘You have not told him about my will?’

‘Not a word.’

‘Nor about Cross’s attempt on my life?’

‘No.’

‘I am sure you will not, George. He might annoy Cross, and I won’t have Cross annoyed: partly from gratitude, and partly because I am afraid of him. I will not have Cross moved against in any way.’

‘I will follow your directions, brother, but I almost think you are unwise.’

‘Ah! but don’t you see I am sure I am not.’

With which wonderfully intelligible bit of wisdom, Arthur closed the conversation and went out.

CHAPTER XII.

CROSS SEES THAT HE MUST ACT.

Cross had planned tolerably well, but his plans had not been successful. Many times previously he had been in difficulties, and had got out of them; just now matters were going rather heavily against him.

One need scarcely tell the reader that he was perfectly prepared to put everything right, by any means in his power. The mischief was that he did not see his way to doing anything. He said to himself that something would happen in his favour, but nothing did.

There came another crushing loss suddenly following on the previous one. He went at once to Burstenberg to consult him. Burstenberg was very frank and friendly with him.

‘So,’ he said, ‘you have lost some more money, Cross, have you? I have lost none now. I can lend you twenty pounds, or give you twenty pounds if you like.’

‘Look here,’ said Cross; ‘I am not to be put off like this. You and I were in a rather rascally business at one time.’

‘Yes,’ Burstenberg replied.

‘I could tell your share in it, you pious noodle,’ said Cross.

‘And I could tell yours. But there is a difference between us. People would believe me, whereas they would never believe you.’

‘We will see that,’ said Cross, and Burstenberg answered, ‘We will.’

‘Will you allow me to tell you that you may go to the devil,’ said Cross.

‘Certainly,’ said Burstenberg, with unimpaired good temper. ‘Will you understand, Cross, that I have pitched you overboard; that I can disprove every word you can say against Lionel Branscombe; and that if I am troubled by you I shall do so.’

‘Who has payed you?’ said Cross, ‘Heaven I suppose.’

‘Why no, at least not yet. Come, I will be frank with you, Cross. I do not want money, but I want prestige; to get that I have thrown you overboard, you understand that. You are not respectable: people begin to fight shy of you. Why, if you had been anything else but an ass, you would never have had your name mixed up with mine in the old time. Now I have worked into paying respectability, I just send you

to the right about. I don't know you, I don't know anything about Lionel Branscombe, his wife, or his child. You are not a paying or respectable acquaintance, Cross, and my memory about past affairs is an utter blank. I got sunstroke in Egypt.'

'You are a lying dog.'

'And an exceedingly low classed Jew at the same time,' said Burstenberg. 'You had better say it all out at once.'

'You are a Papist.'

'Exactly,' said Burstenberg, 'and I am not the first Jew who turned Roman Catholic. There is the door, Cross: and if you are wise you won't come here again.'

What was the meaning of this fellow's insolence? He was merely a low Jew adventurer, a man to whom none of the real Jews, either Sephardim or Anekazim, would ever speak. He was a renegade, of no high

character, and yet he defied Cross! Cross got alarmed.

Money he must have—of that there was no doubt. His quick brain suggested Struan, and he went at once to the Albany.

‘I will get money out of him for letting Lionel alone,’ he said to himself. ‘I will chance the matter that Arthur has not spoken to him about the money I got at Pollington. I can lie myself out of it (Cross never minced matters), if he has heard of it. It is utterly improbable though.’

The outer door was open, and Cross knocked at the inner one. ‘Come in,’ said a cheery voice, and Cross came in. A man with a pipe in his mouth was standing with his back towards the fire. Cross did not know him and asked ‘Is Mr. Struan at home?’

Surely,’ said the stranger; ‘at least,’ he

said in a moment, 'I think he is. Stay I will go and see. You are Dr. Cross, I think.'

'That is my name.'

The stranger eyed him with a curiosity which seemed somewhat impertinent; before he had time to go on his errand to Struan, however, a door from the rear was opened, and Gabriel the footman from Pollington was revealed.

Cross would have died sooner than see him. But he knew now the secret of his disappearance. He was only seen for a moment, and then the stranger went away, leaving Cross musing. Gabriel was there, 'but how,' he said to himself, 'am I to get at him? It must be done, I am afraid, but I don't see my way.'

The strange gentleman soon returned and said that Struan was out but would be back

in half an hour, or less. Would Doctor Cross wait?

Doctor Cross would. And he waited. The strange man sat and smoked, making himself tolerably agreeable. Cross thought him rather a fool, and wondered why he stared so, and took such great interest in him. Had he known who the man was, and how diligently he was helping to ruin him, Cross would have been deeply interested.

He was a fine good-looking fellow, with a brick-dust brown complexion. A very sailor-like looking man. Cross was greatly interested in him.

‘I know your face from somewhere,’ said Cross to him; ‘but I can’t for the life of me remember where. Oh, here is Mr. Struan; how do you do, my dear sir? I want a few words with you in private; I mean in the very strictest privacy.’

‘I am only too delighted to talk with a man of Doctor Cross’s ability,’ said Struan. ‘We will have the strictest privacy. Dickson, my dear fellow, will you kindly go out that way,’ pointing to the back, ‘and lock the further door behind you. I do not want any listening servant; Doctor Cross and I are going to talk on matters of extreme delicacy.’

The stranger did as he was desired without a word. The front outer door was then shut and Cross saw that he and Struan were alone together. He was going to play a bold desperate card, and he went to the point.

‘Mr. Struan,’ he said ‘I am sorry to tell you that I am in difficulties.’

‘A man with a practice like Dr. Cross’s might soon overcome them.’

‘In a very short time I will allow, but my present needs are pressing, so pressing

indeed that I am utterly ruined, unless they can be met.'

'Then you want my assistance?'

'I do, Mr. Struan. You remember an offer you made to me about compounding a felony of Lionel Branscombe?'

'That is very cleverly put, Doctor Cross,' said Struan. 'I am glad you put it so, because now we can bargain as two men of the world, without any mock modesty.'

Cross feigned to laugh; it jarred on Struan's ears and made them tingle. 'I said,' repeated Struan, 'that there need be no "mock modesty" between men of the world like ourselves.'

'Exactly,' said Cross. 'Well, I am needy and utterly unscrupulous, and I will take the money you offered.'

Struan paused. He had paid the black mail before, and did not want to pay it

again. Still he reflected that he had paid it through Arthur, and that Arthur was by no means a person to be trusted as regarded Cross. Suppose that he should refuse to produce the paper which Cross had signed as Arthur had told him : why they were only where they started, Cross was like an eel and might give them a vast amount of trouble. Besides the allied powers were determined to make the man hopelessly commit himself, and the whole thing would not amount to a thousand pounds in all. He tried to catch him. It was immoral possibly in our English ideas of justice, but only in ours. Any foreign juge d'Instruction would have *morally* done the same.

‘That is a very large sum of money, Dr. Cross,’ said Struan.

‘It is the least I will take, however.’

‘Have you ever spoken about making terms with Arthur Branscombe?’

‘Never,’ said Cross. This lie was very frankly told, with a look of wonder.

‘I suppose we had better make short work of it and come to terms,’ said Struan. ‘You see that I am without my principal (which was in one sense true), and I am not fully instructed. However, I will ask. Just sign this paper and I will give you the money in bank notes.’

The paper was soon written out; it ran—

‘Received of Robert Struan, Esq., the sum of 500*l.* on the condition that I, John Cross, M.D., withdraw all charges against Lionel Branscombe, that I declare all charges against him ever made by me to have arisen from misconception, and to be utterly groundless; and that I declare him an innocent man.’

Struan laid the paper before him, and at the same time began carefully counting some bank notes, which he took out of a cash

box, and writing down the numbers of them on a sheet of letter paper.

Cross might have hesitated but for the tempting crackle of the crisp paper. Seeing, like lightning, that his last card was not yet played, he uttered an oath which was not audibly expressed and signed the paper.

‘Count these notes please, Doctor,’ said Struan.

They were correct. ‘I ought to deduct five per cent. discount for ready money,’ said Struan smiling and looking at him askance; ‘but we won’t count that. Now have you any objection to further business?’

‘Not to discussing it,’ said Cross, pocketing the notes with a sigh of satisfaction.

‘Well, this is what I mean. You have a charge against Arthur Branscombe: for what will you sell it?’

‘I must settle that with Arthur myself,

Mr. Struan. It is a matter about which I cannot possibly listen to third parties. What do you know about it?’

‘I frankly confess very little; I only thought that as a gentleman who would take money, you might possibly be bought off—that is all.’

‘I must not make my bargain with Arthur here,’ said Cross. ‘Has he authorised you to make any offer to me on the subject?’

‘Why, no. I am sorry to say that I fear you still retain more of his confidence and love than you deserve. He will not annoy you if he can help it; I do not speak of fair play to a man like you, but I give you warning that if you annoy him—well, you will make very powerful enemies.’

‘I do not doubt it,’ said Cross quietly, and went away without more words.

Struan and Lionel Branscombe were

together about a quarter of an hour afterwards, and exchanged opinions.

Lionel said. 'We have him utterly now on the one point, but we must save Arthur.'

'We must if we can,' replied Struan, 'but I can't see how it is to be done. It seems that George knows enough to hang Cross, and that Cross knows enough to compromise Arthur. But none of them will tell the truth. Meanwhile, Lionel, you are safe and free, the man can't fight *you* after his double treachery.'

'But we must save Arthur,' said Lionel again.

'Assuredly,' said Struan. 'You have attended to George's letter?'

'Yes, if prying can make a good detective, Cross will not be alone for some time.'

‘I don’t see the use of setting Gabriel to watch him.’

‘George knows more than he chooses to tell,’ said Lionel; ‘we will be on the safe side.’

Cross, in the meanwhile, considered himself saved—at least this money made him safe for a time. He had other means, but he could not convert them without lowering certain shares which he was trying hard to raise. It was obvious to him that he must make his grand *coup* at Pollington.

‘If,’ he now argued, ‘I do that, I am absolutely safe. If, on the other hand, I only put the screw on Arthur, my position is very precarious. Arthur only trusts me because at our last interview I never said a word about my power over him or offered to extort money from him on those grounds. He will never alter his will while I leave

him alone, unless Struan and he compare notes, which is an imminent danger, and must be averted at once.'

So he set his brains to avert it. The horrible deed he had done in anticipation had borne no fruits, and remained a mystery which puzzled and irritated him beyond measure. There was prussic acid enough in Arthur's dressing case to kill a ship's company, but no one had taken it as yet. This mystery, a mystery still, must be solved now and for ever, for there was no time to lose.

CHAPTER XIII.

OUR DEAR LADIES TAKE THEIR FIRST
RAILWAY JOURNEY.

‘How near the mountain looks this morning,’ said Lady Alice to Lady Madeleine. ‘If I were twenty years younger I should be able to see the sheep upon it.’

‘Twenty years!’ exclaimed Lady Madeleine.

‘Yes, it is getting on for that time since we came here.’

‘Well, not yet,’ said Lady Madeleine, ‘but it seems like a week since we came. Do you ever wonder what the old folks say about us?’

‘Not much,’ said Lady Alice. ‘Still I have a curiosity. I think some day that I will run over to Castle Browne, and see them all; it would be grand fun entirely. My nephew is Lord there now; he was a gossoon when I saw him last; he’ll do well in the world they say, and indeed he was a fine pickle of a boy, letting Father Moriarty’s pigs into the potatoes in mass time, and Father Moriarty going to me father and saying: “Me lard, I trouble ye for four pound seven for the damage done by your grandson.” “Sure,” says me father, “if your pigs has eat your potatoes they’ll be the fatter for it—the victuals haven’t gone off the premises at all, at all. You’re none the worse!” “But my feelings, me lard,” says the clargy. “As for your feelings, Father Moriarty,” says me father, “I’d do a trifle for them.” “Then,” says Father Moriarty,

“let the O’Rourkes stay on the land.” “They are trashing it till it won’t grow a thistle, and subdividing it,” says me father. “But I won’t evict if you say no; for you are a good man, and a wise one, though you are a Romanist!” And he had in a bottle of the best sherry wine, the same he laid down the year the Prince Regent came to Dublin in a kilt—no ’twas in Edinburgh he did that—and he and me father and me brother Cornelius finished the bottle and another with it, and the O’Rourkes are there now. And me brother Cornelius went out snipe-shooting and came home at one o’clock in the morning, with Mike Burke’s pitchfork under his arm for his gun. I wish you had known him early, Madeleine, he’d have made you a good husband.’

Which was undoubtedly true; for there is not a steadier officer in the service. Lady

Madeleine was very much pleased to find her more eccentric companion in the humour for old memories. 'If you went to Castle Browne you would come back to me?' she said.

Lady Alice at once lifted Lady Madeleine off the ground in her arms and began to cry.

'Do you think that I would ever leave you now, my beloved, after so many patient years, when you have borne with my ill-temper and my wild Irish ways? No, my dear, I will only pray that God may take me first, though that's selfish again. An English woman might be found to do such a thing, but never an Irish woman in the whole of the Island.'

'Don't you be too sure,' said Lady Madeleine, smiling. 'Somebody is coming here to-day who may alter your resolution.'

My brother Algernon has now come home from India for the third and last time, and he is coming to see me this very day. Will you see him ? ’

‘ Your brother coming ? that is grand news,’ said Lady Alice. ‘ He was the only man I ever loved, and he used to pay me attentions which no other man ever did. Now I shall see him again when we are both old ; I am so very glad.’

‘ You are neither of you very old,’ said Lady Madeleine, laughing. ‘ You must take care.’

‘ Perhaps my brother Cornelius may come, and I may have to give you the same warning.’

‘ Your brother is married, mine is a bachelor,’ said Lady Madeleine, ‘ so I am safe.’

He came while they were still in the

garden, and Lady Madeleine went at the broad central walk to meet him. Brother and sister had not met for some years, and so Lady Alice went on with trimming the roses.

At last they approached her: he was much taller than his sister, but wonderfully like her; he had never been handsome, but he had the same beautiful quiet expression. Lady Alice's heart had been given him years ago, and she gave it over again now.

‘Do you remember me, Lady Alice?’ he said, taking her hand in his.

‘The Irish never forget those who are kind to them,’ she replied, with just a shade of tenderness in her voice.

This was an entirely new fact to the Indian judge; but then he had been so long out of the country, you see. He answered:

‘You speak with all the warmth and generosity of your nation, but I cannot allow that you ever incurred any obligation to me. On the contrary you gave me the benefit of your society, and to some extent of your confidence, when we were both, in spite of our family connections, almost friendless. My recollections of you are more agreeable than those of any woman I ever met.’

Women may get a trifle grey without losing the power of blushing ; it is perfectly certain that Lady Alice had not lost that power. And that false traitor Lady Madeleine Howard, behaving more like Howard of Escrick than Howard of Effingham, saw suddenly that the gate of the fowl-yard was open, and ran off to shut it. It was not open, as she well knew. The hens were all walking about talking to themselves in a

monotonous tone about barley and eggs, except two who had determined to lay in the same nest in defiance of each other and the proprieties of life, and occasionally enlivened that function by pecking one another on the back of the head, much as George and Arthur Branscombe used to do before the advent of Robert Struan.

Lord Algernon and Lady Alice were alone together; that was all that this false friend desired. She had heard from her brother before that morning, and by degrees had matured a certain plot, or to be more polite, plan, which the reader may possibly guess if he is profoundly sagacious.

‘Alice,’ said Algernon, when they were alone, ‘You tell me that you have not forgotten the past.’

‘I am not likely to, Algernon,’ she said frankly. ‘Before I left the world for this

peaceful home, my pleasantest recollections were of you.'

'You remember what I said to you. You remember how cruelly we were parted by others?'

'I remember well.'

'May I, now that we are older and more independent, say the same words again?'

'Please, Algernon, do not. I beg of you in Heaven's name not to do so. My relations with your sister are such, and they have been continued so long, that any breach of them would ruin her life. This is the third time you have hinted at this, and I have not answered you. Now I meet you face to face, let me tell you once for all that it is impossible. We are both too old to dream of such a thing.'

'How much does Madeleine know?' he

asked simply, not heeding her remonstrances.

‘My secret escaped me once. I told her that I had loved you, and she knew that it was because she was your sister that I consented to join her in the renunciation of the world : but she does not know how far matters went, or how your father separated us. Algernon, will it content you that we should be loving friends henceforth?’

‘It must,’ said Algernon Howard with secret complacency : for he thought that it would be all as he wished in time. ‘Now, Alice, let us go into the house and see Madeleine again.’

Lady Madeleine observed with great content that for the present they were most excellent good friends, and she was very happy.

Then the floodgates of speech were

loosed, and they talked about old times, and the various people whom they had known before Lord Algernon, the cadet, had gone from the world to India, and before Lady Alice and Lady Madeleine had gone still further from the world into Shropshire. Lady Alice said that they were like ghouls, digging out people some of whom had been dead for twenty years. Still she took a turn or two with the spade herself for all that.

‘Lady Emily Tavish, you remember her, Algernon, the girl with the wall eye, and a Scotch pebble brooch, which she had the impudence to compare to real Irish diamonds, when it is well known that there are no diamonds in Scotland, and that the Wicklow gold is better than Scotch silver any day. And she was married to a Manchester man, with a cotton mill, that

bought improper pictures of Highlandmen and Greeks, and such people, and she came into a nice penny too, and he made more of it by letting her shootings: ye wouldn't find an Irishman doing that. She was a good woman though, and wouldn't see the poor want. Wotherston knows her.'

'I suppose you can let me sleep here, Madeleine?' said Algernon. 'I have to go away to-morrow morning.'

'This is a short visit:—whither?'

'I am going to see our nephew at Pollington, after an interval of seventeen years,' said Algernon. 'I suppose that you have not seen him or any one.'

'He has been here twice,' said Lady Madeleine. 'Once for no particular purpose, but again when Clara and Wotherston were married.'

‘How is he getting on?’ asked Algernon.

‘Well, they say that he led at one time a sad life, but we have always found him a perfect gentleman, in his way you know.’

‘I am going to see him,’ said Algernon. ‘I am going to enter into English politics, and he is, all said and done, the man in our branch of the family with more acres than any other member of it. Has he any political power?’

‘I don’t fancy he has much. I do not think that Arthur will be of use to you. He is eccentric, and he is in affliction just now. Wait a few days.’

‘Algernon might do good by going there,’ said Lady Alice. ‘And you might do still more good by going with him.’

‘I *should* like to go with my brother if he goes,’ said Lady Madeleine. ‘Edith has

been there all alone nursing George, for some time now, and she would like to see one of us.'

'She might like to see the pair of us,' said Lady Alice, 'and she will too, for I am going. Send in a hurry now, and tell Wotherston's people to have his big carriage here by half-past nine.'

'Do you use Wotherston's carriages in this free and easy manner?' enquired Algernon, with amused astonishment.

'His horses want exercising now he is away in office,' said Lady Alice, 'and his men would as soon drive for us as for him.'

She might have added sooner, for their master never gave them half-a-sovereign every time they put their horses to.

Pulverbatch was the nearest station to Weston, and our two Ladies, accompanied by Algernon, alighted there half-an-hour

too soon. The station-master was greatly upset, but kept his presence of mind. It was the first time on which the two mysterious ladies of Weston had been seen there in his time. He knew who they were very well, because Wotherston's servant had told him in a hurried whisper on alighting from the box. Which was which, and who was the gentleman with them, he had no time to gather. He rushed on his destruction without a saving hand held out to help him.

‘Lady Madeleine Howard, I believe,’ he said, making his best bow to Lady Alice Browne.

‘If you don't know an Irish woman when you see her,’ said Lady Alice, with assumed severity, ‘I am sorry for you. But it is nothing less than was to be expected. Saxon all over.’

‘My lady,’ said the station-master, get-

ting red, 'I beg to inform your ladyship that I am as good an Irishman as you are yourself. My name's O'Dowd, and a true Catholic like your ladyship.'

'Man,' said Lady Alice, now struggling to preserve a *juste milieu* between her love for an Irishman, and her anger at finding one so ignorant as to suppose that any of her branch of the Browne family could possibly be a Catholic. 'We want tickets for Pollington.' And she turned grandly away from her abashed fellow-countryman. But she recovered her self-possession by comparing unfavourably the country through which they passed, with Ireland as it was before the Man Peel (she never would call him anything else) made the Maynooth Grant. Her ladyship's knowledge of Irish history was not trustworthy.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HAPPY EVENING AT POLLINGTON.

GEORGE, Edith, and Arthur were together one afternoon. George and Edith were reading, Edith a religious and George a secular book, while Arthur was standing in the window silent. At last he turned and said,

‘I make it four pound, eighteen and four pence. What do you two make it?’

As this was the first they had ever heard of it naturally neither of them could say. So they both smiled and were puzzled. Arthur enlightened them by saying,

‘Her.’

Arthur left them exactly where they were until explanations became necessary and it was discovered that Arthur had been thinking to himself for a long time, and was under the impression that he had been saying it all aloud and that they had been listening to it. The discovery greatly disconcerted him because he had forgotten several points in his argument, and was afraid he would have to remember them. Edith, however, saved him further trouble by saying,

‘Of what were you speaking, Arthur?’

‘Widow Wilson’s rent,’ said Arthur promptly; ‘that’s what I make it. She has been here asking for time again, and I never give time; bless you I should have them all down upon me if I did. My Governor used to say that a gentleman should never keep cottage property in his own hands, for they will beg on till they ruin you. Now I am

not going to give her time. Give one, give all, and die in the union.'

'She is a hard-working old trot, Arthur,' said George; 'will you let me pay for her? I have got the money,' he added with a faint laugh.

'That wouldn't do,' said Arthur, shaking his head sagely; 'you'd be paying for the whole lot of them next; and Ninian Chaloner has been at it again and knocked his brother's head through my new sash window which he got me to put in; they fell out about skittles. And he pays for *that* I tell him. And his brother won't pull him: if he does when I am on the bench I won't see him through, though he is not a bad tenant. I have got a different plan with widow Wilson.'

'And what is that?' said George.

'Why,' said Arthur, with a cunning laugh, 'to let her off altogether; don't you see that

makes no precedent; the others know that I won't let *them* off. I think that is deuced sharp; but the idea was not original; I got it from those parables that Edith was reading, about the importunate widow, and the cruel fellow servant.'

'I think you got it out of your own good heart, Arthur,' said Edith; but Arthur did not hear it, for by this time he had realised the fact that George had offered to pay the widow's rent out of his own pocket. This was so astounding that it served him for mental pabulum for the next half hour: at the end of which he came to this lucid conclusion:

'Ninian Chaloner's mother was Betsy Gates of Lettlease Farm, and her father sold all the manure of the land and got down to eight bushels an acre before the Governor had to thrash out his best rick by force and

violence to get his rent. That is what the Scotch people call hypotheec, and they don't like it.'

After a short time he continued, looking out of the window,

'That is the same bay horse that I sold to Anscombe at the "Spread Eagle" in Gloucester : I wonder what Dickenson gave him for it. Anscombe got his money's worth out of me for that horse, though he would have cast me in an action on warranty if he had gone on. He held his tongue after he found out the spavin, and sold him to that fool Dickenson who would buy anything. They are going to stay, they have both got out, and the boxes are being taken down.'

Edith's curiosity led her to the window as the only possible way of finding out what Arthur was talking about. To her unutterable astonishment she saw a fly drawn up

before the door, Lady Madeleine and a strange man standing on the steps, while Lady Alice was directing the removal of some boxes with a large umbrella.

‘We had better go down, Arthur,’ she said.

‘Think so?’ said Arthur; ‘then come on.’

And down they went. Arthur confronted the party on the steps and did not say anything except to tell the servants generally not to chip the oak bannisters with the boxes as they carried them upstairs.

‘I hope we are welcome, Arthur?’ said Lady Madeleine.

‘It is my opinion,’ said Arthur, speaking very slowly, ‘that we had better have fires in all the rooms, or you’ll be having the lum-bago, and you are not so young as *you were*, aunt. Neither, sir,’ he continued, looking at Lord Algernon, ‘are you apparently: and

you, Lady Alice, are getting on in years ; you were pretty old when I was a boy.'

'Arthur,' said Lady Madeleine, holding out her hand, at which he gazed in mute astonishment, 'we are come to pay you a visit.'

'Well, don't go away again, aunt ; that is all I ask of you.'

'This is your uncle Algernon,' she replied smiling, 'from India.'

'I can just remember you before you went to India, sir,' said Arthur, 'and you were kind to me. Well, I will do the best I can for you ; people from that climate generally like a warm mash before bedding down. I didn't mean that, I mean that my cook makes excellent curries.'

Here he stopped and looked fixedly at Lady Alice Browne's bonnet, a vast and expensive structure originally erected in the

year which placed Louis Philippe on the throne of France, but which had since been, as they say of churches, repaired and beautified by her own Irish hands without Parisian advice. He however quickly recovered himself, and said with dignity, almost with grace,

‘ You three have done me a high honour and compliment. Everything I have is at your service. I have not deserved this from you, but I will try to. I am not what I was, and you will find the same thing true about my poor brother.’

Here he was complimented with a sounding slap on the back from Lady Alice. He was not moved or astonished in any way. The congenital insanity of the Irish nation was part of the creed which he had received from his father, and, if she liked to bang him about the back, the laws of hospitality prevented his noticing it.

‘However,’ he said, ‘come in and be welcome to Pollington. Here is our dear little Edith : my new house-keeper will welcome you better than I can. Come into the drawing-room, and take off your ——.’

He was going to say bonnets, but he was uncertain whether Lady Alice’s head-dress was a bonnet in the ordinary acceptation of the word ; so with his usual caution he substituted the word ‘clothes,’ which scandalized that lady greatly, though she was too good to show it. ‘As if we were molasses negroes,’ she said to Lady Madeleine in private ; ‘but he is a good fellow, and I will swear there is Irish blood in him somehow.’

Arthur gave them a good welcome in the way of hospitality : he drove his servants about until everything was in order for

them: no such doings had been seen in Pollington since 'the Governor' died. His servants, from the number of fires which were ordered to be lit, wondered if he was going to burn the house down. Unused to hospitality, he made the mistake of looking merely after his guests' creature comforts, and not giving them what among high-bred people is thought of more highly, his society. But that was no great loss, poor fellow. Edith did the honours for him far better than he could have done them himself: he bustled away to see to everything, and the others let him go without trying to retain him.

He was a secondary person. The sick man is first in consideration; when Lady Alice asked Edith 'how is *he*?' she was understood to mean George. And they all went up-stairs to visit that sinner.

He had been getting better, so Edith told them, and he had his clothes on and was sitting up on a couch. He would get through it she said, but would never be the man he was before. Lady Alice said that was a bad hearing indeed. She had expressed a totally different opinion shortly before on reading the letter which had come to them from Pollington. But then Lady Alice was brought up on the other side of that channel which takes its name from the patron saint of the tyrannical Saxon.

George was very glad to see them. 'This,' he said to Lady Madeleine, 'is like a promise of better days, aunt. If I am to die I am not afraid now ; not in the least. You will be kind to old Arthur when I am gone, won't you ?'

'But you shan't die, George,' said she.

‘I am afraid that is past your mending, Aunt Madeleine,’ said George : ‘listen to my breath.’

‘Your breath,’ said Lady Alice, who had sat down behind him, ‘your breath is well enough. Why my uncle, Lord Dennis Browne, lived for twenty years with both lungs gone. Not that there was ever any consumption known in Ireland till the traitor Londonderry (it’s Castlereagh some of them call him ; they never know their own names in England) introduced it with his wicked Union. You’ll do well enough.’

‘In the next world possibly,’ said George, ‘but I fear not in this : I know that I may linger on for years and years, but I can never enjoy life again. I say “again.” that is nonsense ; I never *have* enjoyed life until now, though, God knows, I risked my soul to do so : every hour of my present life

is more precious to me than a year of my old one.'

'And why?' said Lady Alice.

'I don't know,' said George; 'I think it is because everybody seems to care for me more. Arthur is so kind, and Edith is so kind, and it all dates from Struan's coming. I think that you said my uncle Algernon was here. He was in love with you, Lady Alice, once, and I am in love with you now. Ah, I know a great many things more than I speak of, Lady Alice.'

Algernon came to him at once, but he only made a singular request in answer to the enquiries after his health.

'You see, uncle Algernon, that you can do anything. Ask them to let me come down to dinner to-night. Two of Arthur's grooms could get me down perfectly well, and then,' he added in a whisper, 'I don't

like to be alone at all times, I have been frightened. My nerve is gone ; and besides I want to see company. There is no danger down there,—I mean in my going downstairs. Do manage it for me.'

Algernon, most good-natured of souls, told him that it should be done ; and soon after they all left George and dispersed. He lay reading by himself very quietly, taking alternately Blaine's rural sports and Thomas à Kempis. What Arthur would have made of his conversation after a course of these two authors I have not the audacity to enquire. George seemed to get on tolerably well.

When Arthur came, heated with the exertions of hospitality, very late into the drawing room, he had only time to take Lady Alice's arm, put his elbow into her ribs, and lead her into the dining room.

Everything had been got ready, though the household was not accustomed to dinner parties, and Arthur felt that he was not only a magistrate but a gentleman. If he could only save George, he thought, how happy they might all be again.

And lo! there was George, brought downstairs and sitting in an easy chair next to him. He at once left Lady Alice in silence, and shifted George's cushions. Then he returned to the head of the table, and standing up said, to the confusion of everyone except the person addressed :

‘ Lady Alice, will you say grace ? ’

No Irish woman (‘ and she a Browne,’ argued Lady Alice), was likely to be disconcerted by a Saxon booby like him. Lady Alice rose, said ‘ Bless the victuals,’ and sat down again. She would have performed high mass if she had known how, and if

Lady Madeleine had asked her, under protest of course.

It was not an unpleasant party by any means. The reader will be good enough to remember that not one of the people assembled was in any way used to society. They all had their specialities, and talked about them. Everyone contributed as best he or she could to the conversation; all wanted to be agreeable to each other, and they were so.

‘I see,’ remarked Lady Madeleine, *à propos de rien*, ‘that the “Times” spells Coliseum with an o.’

‘The O’Briens spell their name in the same way, only they put the o first,’ said Lady Alice. ‘And it’s the same with the Pope—his name’s spelt with an a in all foreign countries. They call him Pape. Urban the Sixth was the last Protestant pope

you ever had. He set up the rock of Cashel and the round towers which are bigger than the Saxon towers of Chichester, and would have drained the bog of Allen, but that he was stopped by the cardinals.'

Arthur in the meantime rambled on in his usual way, considering that the laws of hospitality forbade him to leave off. Algeron Howard told George about the sporting and riding side of Indian life, and George listened with attention and replied with intelligence and vivacity. To be talking on equal terms with a refined gentleman was new to George.

It seemed as though really brighter times were coming on Pollington at last.

And they saw no handwriting upon the wall, nor indeed, had they done so, was there a Daniel to read it for them.

CHAPTER XV.

GEORGE GIVES ARTHUR ALL HE HAS.

CURSING the summer weather, and the still long summer-days which contracted within so few the hours in which he could work out his wicked plot, and increased his danger, Cross slowly but surely crept towards his unconscious victim, using at its highest powers one of the keenest brains which was ever devoted to the devil's service.

He was essentially a man of the town, and hated the country. He knew, and liked a beautiful landscape on canvas, but he had no eye for one before it was composed

and put into an artistic form by the painter. And so the afternoon which was spent by him at a beautiful little forest-embowered inn, seemed the longest and most wearisome he had ever known.

He left the inn walking towards the end of the afternoon ; he was in a part of the country six miles from Pollington, where he had never been, and where he would have been utterly unknown even had he been in his everyday garb ; but he was now disguised beyond recognition. Keeping to the very quietest lanes and paths, so as to meet but few of the home-going labourers (each of whom gave him a cheerful ‘good-night,’ little dreaming of his direful errand), he in a very few miles reached the outskirts of Arthur’s park, at a place where there was no gate ; and with some difficulty clambering over the deer-fence, stood breast-high

in fern, about an hour after the sun had set behind the tall distant chimneys of Pollington House, the hospitable smoke from which was ascending into the evening air.

‘The fool has got some fancy about warming his house,’ said Cross. ‘I wonder what craze this is?’

But he crept on under the dark shadows, relentless; the rabbits gave scarcely a look at him, and then dived into their holes with his secret. A herd of deer looked at him and then fled in wild confusion, as though they would have cried, ‘Murder!’ and roused the country. The roosting pheasant cock, with his hoarse cry, seemed trying to warn his owner who might shoot him ruthlessly on the morrow. Only the man sped on, cruel and ungrateful, to the treacherous destruction of his familiar friend; on an errand which the most savage tiger in

the Indian jungle would never have undertaken. Man almost alone among animals habitually destroys his own species.

He was served by the moon. She had been down for an hour before he entered the house in safety. He knew every inch of the way, and felt-shod he crept on to the door of Arthur's room, by the back stairs. The door was ajar—a piece of good luck he had not anticipated, though he had his oiled key ready. He looked in; George was in bed, and breathing heavily. Arthur, too, he thought, was silent in his bed, which he could dimly see; it was now half-past eleven, and he was obviously in his first heavy sleep, from which nothing short of kicks could wake the lumbering brute, as he said to himself. Only a dimly burning night-light was by George's bed. All was well, and he stole in, having made his

preparations. He held a handkerchief saturated with chloroform in one hand, ready for George if he should move, while in the other was the deadly and sudden quietus for Arthur.

He knew every detail of George's accident, but he did not know that he never slept until Arthur gave him his sedative in bed ; still less did he dream that Arthur was not in bed at all, but was in the dining-room in slow conversation on his part about carriage-horses, with Lord Algernon Howard.

He stealthily looked into George's face. George was as wide-awake as a fox, and knew him in an instant ; he started up and struck at Cross fiercely.

‘You murderous Devil. Arthur! Arthur! help! Why have you left me?’ he cried, holding Cross's hands as though in a pair of vices.

‘Will you be quiet ! If you are quiet I will leave you alone, you penniless scoundrel,’ said Cross savagely under his breath. ‘Be still and you will be rich to-morrow.’

‘At the sacrifice of Arthur ! I understand you,’ said George, ‘No, sink your soul, you shan’t touch him, I’ll die first ;’ and, relaxing his hold, he tried to jump out of bed, crying again, ‘Arthur ! Arthur !’

The practised hand of Cross was on George’s fractured rib, and the deadly handkerchief was thrust into his mouth. There was one wild scream of agony which rang through the house, and then Arthur was in the now darkened room, crying, ‘George, dear George, my beloved brother, what is it ?’

Cross was out of the room almost before Arthur was in it ; before Arthur could get a light he was far away in the Park, perfectly

safe—a murderer certainly, but with the maddening sense on him of having committed a perfectly useless and possibly dangerous crime.

‘Fancy that soulless hound dying for his brother’s sake. And Edith, the only woman I ever loved, teaching him to do it with her whining prayers. *Is there a God?*’

And he kept repeating this question to himself as he fled under the dark watching trees, and the gazing stars.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE END OF A TURBULENT LIFE.

ARTHUR ran back at once and met Algernon Howard on the stairs with a candle ; he snatched it from him and said, ‘ Go please, and rouse the house and send for the Doctor, I cannot make my brother hear me.’

Then he went back.

When they came in Arthur was sitting on the bed with George’s head on his arm. ‘ He is quite dead,’ said Arthur, quietly, and indeed one glance showed them all that he was. It was obvious that he had ruptured a blood-vessel by some sudden incautious

movement. Lord Algernon at once gave it as his opinion that he had shifted on his side too suddenly and had pierced the lung with the broken bone. (The coroner's jury, after hearing the evidence of the surgeon, unanimously agreed that such was the case afterwards.)

But Arthur spoke no word, good or bad, to any of them. He asked them to go away, and they left him with his dead brother. None of them went to bed again, and they heard him tramping up and down the room all night. The earliest servant reported that he had been in the park soon after daybreak talking to someone.

Edith came to him very early ; she found him dressed. He had covered the whole bed with a great shawl of vast value, which he had hoarded away somewhere, and he

spoke to her very quietly, but with a very strange expression.

‘You will see that everything needful is done, Edith. Did he die in the Roman Catholic faith?’

‘There was not time——’

‘Because if he did he should be buried by that communion,’ said Arthur.

And so he went down to the stable-yard, silent. The servants dared not speak to him nor hardly look at him : he asked for Jacob, and the young man came with flushed face and tearful eyes.

‘Jacob,’ he said, ‘take his saddle and bridle, and everything which belonged to him, up to my bedroom. You will find him and me there alone.’

‘May I see him, master?’ sobbed the young fellow. ‘I should like to see him

again. He was very kind to me after Mr. Struan came to live here.'

'You shall see him, Jacob,' replied Arthur, and went away tearless with his head bowed.

All that experience, love, and care could do had been done; and when Arthur later turned down the sheet which covered the face, while not only Jacob, but all the other tearful servants stood by, he saw his poor wild brother before him, looking ten years younger, with a rose upon his bosom. He seemed so peaceful and holy in death, with every devil cast out of him, that Arthur remarked something to the servants, without any cogitation at all, a thing most unusual to him.

'You may depend upon it,' he said, gazing slowly round, 'that that is the way he looks at this moment in Heaven.'

Who could contradict him, and who would if they could? It is only certain to us that the body of George lay there silent upon the bed, and that it could never gamble or cheat or lie any more. Where was the poor wild fellow himself? That is past all telling. Poor Arthur had gathered that he was in Heaven; let us leave him alone with his belief.

No one save those absolutely necessary went into that room until the funeral; only they knew that Arthur slept in the next one, and they heard him often go into the chamber of death in the night. Before the coffin was closed the others took leave of him; and then the world saw him no more.

Somehow or another there had been a revulsion of feeling going on for a time in favour of the two brothers of Pollington.

Little by little it had leaked out that they had amended their lives, and were behaving very well. Struan had possibly something to do with this opinion. It is certain that although no one was asked to George's funeral, there was such a gathering of carriages in front of the house as had not been there for thirty years, and people had left their cards during the preceding week who had never been near the house during the later years of old Branscombe. Perhaps the presence of Lord Algernon and Lady Madeleine Howard, with Lady Alice Browne, did good ; but it is certain that poor George was more highly honoured in his death than ever he was in his life.

George was laid beside his turbulent old father in the family vault. Arthur went in with his hands full of roses, which Edith had given him at his desire ; he laid them

impartially on the coffins of his father and his brother ; and so they were left alone together in that place where there is no quarrelling and no anger, with the heart-breaking regret of one dull soul which had done its best to love them.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET DISCLOSED.

Cross, in his guilty terror, but with infinite relief, read the report of the inquest on poor George. That extraordinary creature Arthur was sworn, and with some reluctance, which was regarded as fraternal grief, gave his evidence as to finding his brother dead. He had been taken up and put to bed at the usual time, but Arthur had delayed going up to him early as usual, in consequence of a long conversation between him and Lord Algernon Howard. Then the medical evidence showed the cause of death: Mr.

George evidently fancying himself stronger, had tried to move without the assistance of his brother, on which he was dependent night and day ; he had fallen back, and the fractured rib had entered the lung and killed him. The jury at once returned a verdict of ‘accidental death,’ and condoled with Mr. Arthur Branscombe on the loss of a brother whom he had nursed so tenderly.

Cross wrote to Arthur condoling with him, and saying how sorry he was that he had not been by. To which letter Arthur promptly answered, rewriting a letter which was lying on his desk.

‘The Grange, Weston.

‘My dear Cross,—I am terribly cut up about poor George. I can’t stand Pollington at present, and so the two good ladies have taken me in here. I wish you would come and see me. I want to talk to you about a

certain affair, not *Lionel's* or *George's*. You know what I mean. Try to come Thursday if you can.

‘ARTHUR BRANSCOMBE.’

Cross telegraphed that he would come, and he went. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that I can get in with him again. What I said to Struan about his affair may be very well got out of. I said that I would settle it with him.

‘What can I do if I do regain my influence over him? I am completely at a loss to know. I have but one card to play—my knowledge of these old forgeries of his. He thinks that I hold the documents as proof, not dreaming that the old man, his father, bought them up from me, and paid me for them. Still, he *can't* know that. I must have quiet and private speech with him, and see what I can do. As for anything further, my nerve is not equal to it.

I should make a fiasco just now. It is lucky he is in this humour ; however, it will give me time to turn round.' And so he arrived at Weston.

He was shown into the drawing-room at the Grange, where he found Lady Alice, Lady Madeleine, Edith, and a little gentleman in black, whom he did not know. The three ladies bowed courteously to him, and sat down, Lady Alice by no means aggressively this time, yet he liked the style of that Irish woman's sitting down still less than on a former occasion.

Lady Alice and Lady Madeleine had Edith between them. 'They are going to play some card with her,' he said, puzzled ; 'I wonder what it is.' He, as requested, sat down on a chair, facing the window which looked out into the bright garden.

'Dr. Cross,' said the little man, 'you

have been asked to come here to talk over a few matters of business.'

'I shall be really only too charmed,' said Cross; 'but I must confess that I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance.'

'You shall have it, sir, at once. I am Father Wilson, a member of the Society of Jesus.'

'I cannot say I ever heard of you, sir,' replied Cross, 'but of course I am delighted. May I point out the fact that I came here by appointment to meet Mr. Arthur Branscombe.'

'He is close by, sir, but we wished to say a few words to you on a certain subject, before you see him. I only wish to say, Dr. Cross, that we desire a compromise.'

'Is the presence of these ladies necessary?' asked Cross, coolly.

'Yes.'

‘Very well then, go on. I am afraid that I may have to say much which will distress Mrs. Lionel Branscombe; but pray proceed.’

He was more and more abroad; his head throbbed.

‘Now, Doctor Cross, I have taken your case in hand, and I have other work to do, so I must make an end of it. Will you compound with us for leaving Lionel Branscombe alone?’

‘There are too many people here to render it desirable to talk about such a delicate business,’ replied Cross, coolly. ‘And you will allow me to observe to you how very much at random you are talking. Leave Lionel Branscombe alone—from what? I desire to see Mr. Arthur Branscombe, who made an appointment with me at this place and time.’

‘He is not ready to see you,’ said Father Wilson. ‘He will be directly. We will settle the affair of Lionel first.’

‘You can settle anything you choose, my good sir,’ said Cross, with an air of indifference, though he was groping, half-maddened, in the dark; ‘only pray don’t be too long about it, for my professional time is valuable.’ He saw that Wilson held threads in his hand of which he, Cross, was totally ignorant.

‘You know Mr. Struan, Dr. Cross?’

‘Yes,’ said Cross, ‘where is he?’

‘He telegraphs from London,’ said Father Wilson. ‘If you doubt me as a Jesuit read that message.’

Cross looked at it, and with a sigh of relief saw that it was genuine. Struan, he thought, could not be there before the next day.

‘Mr. Struan,’ said Cross, ‘made certain proposals to me which are still in abeyance ; he proposed a meeting between me and Mr. Lionel Branscombe. I should like to see that gentleman, it would simplify matters. Where is Lionel Branscombe ?’

‘Well, it may simplify matters if you do see him. He is here, and will speak to you himself.’

Cross felt himself being beaten in detail, yet he had the courage of Volpone. He said nothing. Father Wilson went to the door and called into the sunlit garden, ‘Lionel !’

‘Let me go. Why have you done this to me ?’ said Edith, feebly struggling ; ‘it is too bad. It is cruel. Oh, let me go.’

But Lady Alice’s strong arm was round her, and Lady Madeleine’s thin fingers were gently twined in hers. Between strength and gentleness she was subdued, and re-

mained pale and terrified—expectant, yet full of strange dread.

Up the broad walk came two figures—one Clara, bright and handsome, the other the old dark figure of the monk in black which had haunted the Grange Garden so long—the figure of the poor deformed and ruined Lionel.

He came into the middle of the room. Clara left him and sat beside Lady Madeleine, reaching her hand over so that it could touch that of Edith. So fortified, Edith rested her hands on the brave Irish breast of Lady Alice and prepared for what was to come. ‘I was never faithless to you, Lionel,’ she thought. ‘I did like Struan, but that is all over. I wish I could have been spared this.’

‘Someone here wishes to speak to me,’ said Lionel from under his hood.

Cross spoke. 'Are you Mr. Lionel Branscombe, or are you masquerading? I think there is a secret plot against me.'

'I am easily identified,' said Lionel. 'Do you desire to see my face after what you know has happened to me?'

'Yes,' said Cross defiantly.

Edith shuddered, but Lady Alice whispered 'Courage, my darling,' and she was still outwardly, but her heart beat violently.

'You shall see me then,' said Lionel, suddenly dropping his monk's dress, which fell on the floor about him.

Cross bounded to his feet with some horrible, half-inarticulate oath. Edith burst from her captors and stood up with both hands held out towards him. For there stood, not Lionel, but—Struan.

And yet Lionel, for he cried in the voice she remembered now,

‘Edith, my beloved, will you come to me now? I have tried to win your heart twice, and failed the second time, as you know’ (here he smiled). ‘My own hardly-tried wife, rest your head upon my bosom, and nothing shall part us but death.’

She ran to him, and put her face on his breast.

‘Why did you try me so cruelly, darling?’ she gasped; ‘I did not know you; think of that!’

‘I ought not to have tried you so, Edith dear, I was wrong. But you came out of the trial so well, my love, that I cannot regret it; can you forgive me?’

‘It is I who have to ask forgiveness,’ she responded, nestling still more closely to his heart; and there was silence in the room for the space of half a minute, during which Lady Alice regarded Cross keenly.

Cross saw Edith, whom he had once tried to gain, in the arms of Lionel, the man he had tried to ruin. He saw at once that Lionel was Struan, and Struan, Lionel. He knew how hopelessly he had committed himself to Lionel, and how almost certainly Lionel had let Arthur know that he had compounded twice over about the charge against him. He was hemmed in on every side. There had been, he could see (no need for a Jesuit like Wilson to tell him), a plot against him for some time. Lady Alice saw that he was taken by surprise ; he certainly took her.

He folded his arms and laughed sneeringly. ‘As soon as you have finished your long deferred endearments with your wife, Mr. Lionel Branscombe, I should like to ask you where Mr. Arthur Branscombe is, and where I can get a constable? You fools, do you think that you can play with me? I

was taken by surprise when I found that the man Struan, with whom I had compounded a felony was the man who committed it, Lionel Branscombe. I am afraid I swore before ladies, a *betise* I seldom commit. I was brought here under the pretence of seeing my friend, Mr. Arthur Branscombe. I should like to see him.'

'Mr. Arthur Branscombe is in the next room', said Father Wilson. 'He desires to explain his own affairs to you alone. That is your way,' said the priest politely waving his hand to the half-opened door.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ARTHUR AND CROSS SETTLE MATTERS ALONE.

HE passed into the room, and there stood Arthur and Gabriel the footman.

Cross paused. The combination struck him as very singular ; but he knew he must not hesitate.

‘ Arthur,’ he said, ‘ are you in this combination against me ? ’

‘ No,’ said Arthur quietly ; ‘ were I, I could utterly ruin you. I yielded to them in having you here at all. You must make such terms as you can with them. You and I have to speak together. Gabriel, you can go.’

Cross sat and listened, with a growing gleam of hope. He, at all events, had this booby to himself; it were strange if he could not right himself now.

‘Cross,’ continued Arthur, with none of his old hesitation, ‘you knew certain facts about me, which, whether generously or with a view of ultimate gain, you have hitherto withheld : name them.’

‘If you insist upon it I must,’ said Cross. ‘On three occasions you forged your father’s name for large amounts.’

‘And what became of the proofs?’ asked Arthur.

‘They are in my possession,’ said Cross, ‘but they are known of to others, whom I have kept quiet.’

Arthur smiled sadly. ‘Cross, who was the last person with my father on his death-bed?’

‘Why you, to be sure,’ said Cross, adding to himself, ‘if the old man said anything Arthur would have told me long ago.’

‘Not I,’ said Arthur, ‘I was not there. He died in the arms of his sister-in-law, Lady Madeleine Howard. He sent for her and told her how I had committed something which the law could reach, and that he had bought up the proofs, for that I had been behaving like a dutiful son to him; and then he made her burn them. But the main reason he wanted to see her was lest I should come into some dreadful trouble, and there should be no home for Clara; and he begged Lady Madeleine in such an emergency to give her a home. There were few men like my governor, Cross.’

‘And how long have you known this cock-and-bull story?’ sneered Cross.

‘Not until very lately, when she found

out that I had done something which gave you a hold over me. You need not have kept this sword over my head so many years, Cross; it was by this and your supposed generosity in the matter that you first gained you influence over me, and made me love you. My eyes are opened now for ever, your power over me is gone, and my love is changed to dislike. Yet for the sake of what I believed you to be for so many years, I will connive at your escape, even now.'

'My escape!' said Cross, indignantly.

'Ah, Cross, your time is very short; try to be a better man. Do you know that my poor brother laid a plot for you, and that he and I saw you take one of the bottles from my dressing-case, and that I found it replaced with poison?'

'Arthur, I swear—' said Cross, with a clammy sweat breaking out upon his face.

‘What need?’ replied Arthur. ‘I forgave you that because I balanced the good you had done me and the temptation I had put in your way with the evil you intended me. But I must go on, Cross. You murdered my poor brother George! Do you know the colour of his blood, Cross? do you know the handkerchief stained with it which I found in his mouth, marked with your name? Do you know that Gabriel was on your trail for the last three days before his death, and marked you down in the house, and when he heard what had happened followed you no further for fear of sharing my poor brother’s fate? Have you one single word to say now?’

‘Have mercy,’ he said, in a dry whisper.

‘You had none on him or on me,’ said Arthur; ‘yet the memory of my father shall save you. He, good man, had mercy on

me, and saved me when I least deserved it ; and I will do the same by you for his sake. You must take my terms, and they are only a week's silence.'

Cross was now entirely beaten. To have been this half-brained idiot's dupe, for half a year, after Arthur had been his dupe so long ; to find that he had lost everything hopelessly by a tolerably clumsy plot of Jesuits, old women, men he had thought lunatics, and grooms, of which plot he had not the least suspicion, was too much for him.

He said, 'How many know what you say you do?' But he spoke with great difficulty.

'Enough for my purpose,' said Arthur. 'Now I must have these policies of insurance sent to me, made over to my lawyer to-morrow : you must be particular not to fail in this, and you must be on your way to

America in four days. You have money, I know ; remember, the policies *of all things* ; I must and will have them. Now go ; I hope you will try to be a better fellow.'

'Will you shake hands?' said Cross, looking deadly faint, and evidently only keeping himself together by a potent effort.

'No, I will *not*,' said Arthur indignantly ; and possibly the reader will hereafter think that he was lucky in his resolution.

Cross went, without one sentiment of gratitude, remorse, or sorrow. He had only one regret, and that was that Arthur had eluded his murderous hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

ARTHUR ABDICATES.

ARTHUR called back to Gabriel. 'My boy,' he said, 'you have held the secret about this man for a long time. You must keep it longer; to the day of your death.'

'Master,' said Gabriel, 'I will never say anything about it. I began spying him after he insured my life, and then Mr. George warned me, for he and I were always thick, and so I watched. And when I heard about Mr. Lionel's being locked up, I betrayed Mr. George and wrote to Lady Madeleine. But I have always been on the watch; and so was Mr. George.'

‘Keep your council, my boy,’ said Arthur, and went into the next room.

‘Ladies and Gentlemen,’ he said, ‘I preferred having a private interview with Doctor Cross by myself, in which determination I upset some of your arrangements. Well, he is on his high road to America, and you need trouble yourselves no more about him. I am one of those people who never do things by halves, and I have smashed up Cross.’

At this point he grew dumb, and looked at Lady Madeleine, who laughed at him. Then he turned to Lady Alice, who laughed at him also; then he turned to Clara, and was rather dumbfounded by finding that Wotherston had dropped in and was beside her; then, as a last resource, he stared at father Wilson in a stony manner. But this was no good either, for an entirely new man,

whom he had never seen before, was standing by Father Wilson smiling at *him*.

The cause of his consternation was this : in the middle of the room was his friend Struan, the man who had done so much to regenerate his life and poor George's, and he had his arm round Edith's waist.

He sat down promptly in Lady Alice Browne's lap. She calling his attention to the fact, he sat down on the next person, who happened to be Lord Algernon Howard, who cautiously removed him to a vacant place next him.

'Arthur,' said Lionel, 'Don't you know your brother? I am Lionel.'

'Ah !' said Arthur, 'so I hear you say. Have it all your own way, I beg of you. I never contradict anyone except in my own house. I suppose the form of a reference to a respectable householder, or a warranty

from a qualified vet., would be too much to ask for. As for pedigrees,' added Arthur in contempt, 'I don't give that for them ; I have made too many up—I mean I have seen too many made up, myself.'

'But I really and truly am your brother,' said Lionel, laughing.

'When did I dispute it?' answered Arthur. 'I was puzzled at your knowing your way to the red room, too, and Cross swore at me for waking him. Well, I have had to settle *him* single-handed, and my head is rather in a whirl. I thought you were Robert Struan lately. Edith said you were.'

'And thought so,' said Lionel. 'Arthur, can you forgive me my deceit? I acted as I thought for the best all through. We had a very difficult game to play, and my friends agreed for more than one purpose that I was

to assume another name, and never be spoken of, even among themselves, save by that name. The plot may have been a little far-fetched, but it has been successful.'

'At the price of George's death,' thought Arthur afterwards. But he was silent, and remained so, partly because just now he did not see that point. Presently he said,

'I have nothing to forgive, brother. You made a new man of George, and I am no worse than I was. God has been very good to me. Here is my little Clara come back; here is Edith, who has made the house like a heaven; here are Lady Madeleine and Lady Alice. I have only lost George, and, next to the governor, there was no one like him. I have to thank you for all of this.'

'You have to thank yourself for no little of it, Arthur,' said Lionel. 'But we will say

no more to-day. You will let Edith and me go home to Pollington with you, and occupy my old rooms?’

‘You are the heir, Lionel,’ said Arthur, ‘and the house is yours; Wotherston, Edith is mistress of the house now. I hope, my dear Edith, that you will get my little Clara to stay with us as much as possible, and any friends I am sure. You, sir, I hope, as a friend of my brother-in-law, will come and see me.’ This he said to the man who had come in with Wotherston, and whom he did not know.

‘I shall be happy to come to Pollington, Arthur,’ said this man. ‘I remember it very well.’

Arthur looked from him to Lionel, and from Lionel back to him. He was at sea: they were very like after all.

‘I am the real Robert Struan, Arthur,’

said he. 'You will let me come now, will you not?'

Arthur said, 'I was very cruel to you, but I will make amends if I can.'

'When I came home from New Zealand,' said the real Struan, 'I went to Lionel, just then out of seclusion. He remembered his old love for me, and we went together into this plot. Why we lived together, and Lionel personated me! I had distinguished myself in the New Zealand war, and Lionel introduced himself to a great personage in the park as me, and he did not know the difference. Well, all our fun of that kind will do for fireside stories hereafter.'

CHAPTER XX.

CONCLUSION.

LORD ALGERNON and Lady Alice Browne were walking up and down together under the cedars by the trout pond ; and they were silent. Lady Alice guessed what he was going to say, and he seemed unwilling to say it. She determined therefore to say it for herself.

‘Algy,’ she said, putting her hand on his arm, ‘I know what you are thinking of.’

‘Yes?’ said he, not unwilling that she should begin.

‘You are going to ask me to marry you, my dear,’ she went on, ‘and I won’t.

Nothing that you can possibly say will induce me to do so.'

'Madeleine desires it,' said Lord Algeron.

'In the first place,' said Lady Alice, 'it is no business of hers, and, in the second place, she is a donkey. She could not do without me, nor I without her after so many years.'

'But you would not be separated. We should live together,' urged he.

'We should be as much separated as if the sea was between us for all that,' said Lady Alice. 'We never could be the same to one another again. A husband puts out everything in a house where there are only two old women. My decision is final and unalterable, my dear Algy.'

'It is a heavy blow to me,' said poor

Lord Algernon. 'I was in hopes to have ended my life so peacefully with you two.'

'Are you not going to do so?' said Lady Alice, surprised.

'How can I after your refusal.'

'But you can come and live with your sister and see after her property; and you could take the home farm off her hands and work it yourself; and this would be a deal to do for you there; and there is a tidy bit of shooting, ours and all Wotherston's, and you would be put on the commission and have your justice work. Why, we would be as happy as the day is long together all three of us without being *married*. There's room for you and your horses and carriages. What is your answer?'

'I had set my heart on the other arrangement,' said Lord Algernon.

'Set it on this one then,' said stout Lady

Alice; 'I'll make you a sister better than any a wife of them. I don't think much of wives, they are always neglecting their husbands for their children, or their pug dogs, or something. The half of wives would think more of a bay mare and a black retriever than the man who paid for them. Come, brother, let us forget it all and be brother and sister, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, till death does us part.'

'Amen,' said Lord Algernon rather sorrowfully. 'Yet we were a good match once, Alice, and after waiting so many years——'

'You have got me at last for your dear and loving friend who is going to spend the rest of her life with you and make you happy as you made her once. As for our ever having been a match, I don't think you

remember; I was so terribly ugly. Now there is an end of all that, thank goodness. I will go and break the news to Madeleine.'

Lady Madeleine was a little disappointed; she had set her heart on the marriage as being the most wonderfully perfect arrangement which could be thought of. But she acquiesced: in a very short time Lord Algernon was installed in the Grange Garden as chief of the household, and a more happy establishment did not exist in England. Lady Alice remarked more than once that she wondered how ever they had got on so long without a man in the house.

Lionel and Edith not only went to Pollington, but were not allowed to leave the place any more. Only a very few friends (including a certain personage whom we once met in the park) had been

let in the secret of Lionel's identity on his return to the world ; and the majority of people had forgotten very much all about him. He set to work to establish a new reputation, which he very quickly succeeded in doing.

Arthur never alluded to George after his funeral, but many things showed them that he felt his loss deeply and keenly. He had a cross prepared to put in the church on a monument which cost a large sum of money. To the monument and the cross Lionel made no objection, but he held his breath at the inscription on it which was composed by Arthur himself ; it was so utterly contrary to fact that he did not know what on earth to do. Arthur let him out of his difficulty in a very singular manner.

‘ We will have that in Latin, brother,’

said he, 'if you will be kind enough to translate it for me; and put it in crabbed old English letters, so that nobody can read it, particularly the Bishop. He might kick up a row about it, and it is only a matter between George and myself, and no business of his if he gets his money for the faculty.'

And so the inscription was sent across country to the bishop who gave his sanction with an eulogium on the fraternal piety of Mr. Arthur Branscombe. Perhaps if the vicar had been allowed to read it first he might have enlightened his lordship over some details.

Arthur now got it into his head that it was absolutely necessary to look sharply after the property. 'Lionel,' he argued, 'will most certainly be made a peer some day, and he can't go into the House of Lords with twopence-halfpenny.' He therefore

looked into his affairs closely and found out, that besides the estate, about 14,000*l.* a year, there was scarcely 100,000*l.* in the bank. This beggarly state of affairs gave him great anxiety, but bethinking himself of a large store of old clothes which he had upstairs, he entered into negotiations with the head of a Jewish firm in Castle Street, Leicester Square, whose advertisements he had seen offering to wait on ladies and gentlemen at their private residences, and pay cash. The head of the house came down, and if ever he got a hard bargain in his life he got one then. He departed with Arthur's clothes, declaring himself ruined for his next financial year. He had to get his pound of flesh out of his next customer, for he never got it out of Arthur.

Arthur made several other small savings, such as smoking tobacco instead of cigars,

and going to quarter sessions in his second best hat ; but there was something very good in these little petty savings, for they were not done for himself but for another ; and they were inflicted entirely on himself. Pollington, to do Arthur justice, had always been a liberal house ; now it was more so than ever. Though he might stint himself, he never stinted his guests, his servants, or his horses.

He knew one thing ; that with his consummate knowledge he could make money by horse-breeding. To this he determined to give his mind, and in this he was lavish. Lionel mildly remonstrated with him on the investments which he made, but when Arthur showed him his books he said no more.

It was astonishing now how near Pollington was discovered to be to Weston, which places, in old times, were found to be

so very far apart. The members of the two houses were very much mixed up together, some of one household being pretty sure to be nearly always found in the other. This arrangement was greatly assisted by the arrival of Lord Cornelius Browne, Lady Alice's brother.

Arthur, and indeed all the others, had lately heard a great deal about this 'brother Cornelius,' but not one of them had ever seen him in their lives. Lady Alice described him as a handsome likeness of herself, but that gave to no one's imagination the remotest inkling of anything. It was known that he lived alone in the west of Ireland on a tolerable estate which he never left save to make excursions to America. He was represented to be as ferocious a patriot in his way as Lady Alice was in hers; and the general idea about him was that he was a savage nobleman, for

having beaten an attorney in the streets of Ennis and having been fined for that exploit, he announced that he should repeat the process every time that the attorney took the air. Lady Alice had not undervalued his moral pugnacity or his mere physical fighting powers, his arrival therefore was looked forward to with great curiosity.

He was inconceivably different from the idea which everyone had formed of him ; he was a tall handsome man, as upright as a dart, with pleasant humour on every line of his brown face from his close cropped grizzled hair down to his grey moustache. ‘ Brother Cornelius ’ was a singularly remarkable and charming man, and at once became as popular with everybody as his sister ; but his singular influence over Arthur Branscombe after his first visit to Pollington was observed by all of them.

He stayed there so much that he was almost a resident ; he seemed to have taken a great fancy for the uncouth squire, which liking seemed to be returned with interest. Lionel was extremely pleased at this, firstly, because Arthur had really no intimate associate, and secondly, because Lord Cornelius' influence would certainly be for good. The fellow feeling between men so opposite in appearance, age, and character was brought about by the mere fact that they were both enthusiastically devoted to draught horses.

Lord Cornelius had never seen such cattle as Arthur's in his life, and he bluntly confessed so. A confidence and a compliment like this soon led to further matters ; the whole stud was laid open to Lord Cornelius' inspection, and Arthur very soon perceived that he knew more about the whip than even poor George, and more about the breeding

of collar-horses than Arthur himself; such a man was a wonderful discovery for Arthur, and he cultivated his man sedulously.

It became evident after a time that there was some business scheme on hand between them, what it was no one seemed to know, for Lord Cornelius was as mysterious as Arthur. It involved Arthur's making his will, so Lionel accidentally found out from the family solicitor. Lionel got a little anxious now lest Arthur, who had been blindly led at least once before in his life, should be following too implicitly some scheme of the excellent Irishman. However, he could do nothing or move in any way in so delicate a matter, and reflected after all that Arthur was an extremely difficult person to cheat.

One morning, at breakfast, Arthur, who had been all the early morning at his stables, said to Lionel,

‘I have left a power of attorney with you to act in any way for me, Lionel. I think that everything is in perfect order. I don’t know how long I shall be. I shall write to you every mail, and if a year goes by with not hearing anything from me, you take possession and administer.’

‘Are you going abroad, Arthur?’ said Lionel, aghast.

‘No,’ said Arthur, ‘I don’t know the language. I am going to America.’

‘Pray, Arthur, what is your reason?’

‘Well, I am not at liberty to mention. Cornelius and I have a scheme of our own which we do not wish discussed. He joins me at Liverpool. I take a pair of horses, with Jacob, Tims, and Peter.’

He really gave Lionel but little more information, and by the end of the week he was gone, perfectly imperturbable and silent.

The grand scheme which the genius of Lord Cornelius, assisted by the slower and shrewder sense of Arthur had developed, was this ; to introduce the highest and most expensive of stud trotting stock from America into England, a by no means foolish idea, and of which they thought so highly that they involved it with a slight amount of unnecessary mystery, even among their own friends. Arthur took with him his best pair of carriage horses, and at New York, where Lord Cornelius was well known, received a price which surprised and gratified him. After this first success Lord Cornelius and he ‘looked about them.’

The opportunity which they sought was not long in coming ; a young horse, with a pedigree like St. Albans, or any other well-known horse which you may pick out, trotted in a match and won it against two of

the finest horses of the day, to the astonishment of all, except those who knew him and his family antecedents. The rule of the race was that the horse should be put up for sale at the owner's price. The owner put on him the prohibitory price of 25,000 dollars, which Arthur at once paid, to the intense disgust of the bystanders, who saw another Plenipo jockeyed out the country by an Englishman. There was nothing to be done, however, the horse was Lord Branscombe's (as the dealers called him), and was promptly shipped the day after and despatched for England under the care of Lord Cornelius and Jacob; Arthur being left to take care of himself and look about him in the United States.

He passed about a fortnight not unpleasantly at this occupation, for there is a great deal to be seen in New York, and

Lord Cornelius had left him some acquaintances, who gave him advice and assistance in the most friendly way, telling him what to go and see, where to dine and so on. Arthur gave himself a holiday and went everywhere except to church ; but after two weeks he had had enough of the East and fulfilled part of the programme which he and Lord Cornelius had sketched out ;—he went to see what horses there were in the West.

He was much pleased with the great agricultural emporia of the West, and from his knowledge of country matters began to throw off his natural shyness and make acquaintance with such people as he thought he should like at the hotels. He changed his name also and called himself Mr. Chaloner, for he had more than reason to suspect that his grand coup of buying ‘Young General Clay’ had made the horse

market a rather difficult thing to anyone owning the name of Branscombe.

He had been three or four days in a certain large though very irregulated city no great distance from either the Missouri or the Mississippi, and he was sitting over the stove in the general room meditating bed, when he was aroused by the noisy entrance of thirty or forty men, almost all well dressed, who were talking together at the top of their voices.

One man who came in first, and who was evidently the most important of them, withdrew himself and placing his back against the wall requested silence, which was at once accorded. Arthur was not at all surprised when he saw that it was Dr. Cross.

He only pushed his hat over his brows and sat and listened, feeling inclined to be greatly amused.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Dr. Cross, ‘let us calmly discuss the matter between us here. What do you desire of me?’

‘What we desire of you, sir, is very plain,’ said a very hot gentleman. ‘Continue the noble work which you have so long carried on in your private capacity; do not cease to dog at the heels of these scoundrels like a bloodhound; unmask them; tear them in your own good time, and then receive your reward.’

Doctor Cross, with his hands in his trousers’ pockets and his back against the wall, replied,

‘Now, gentlemen, let us look this matter full in the face. I am only an English physician, practising with some success in this town for three years past. From putting together one thing and another I very soon came to the conclusion that there was a

ring which was mismanaging the municipal revenues of this city in a shameless manner. It was no business of mine, I must live a stranger and offend no one, but only be too thankful for the hospitality accorded me. I said nothing, yet these men discovered that I knew too much. What did they do? a safe thing they thought. They offered to bribe *me*. Honest indignation caused me to break forth, and I put their letter before the town council. (Great cheering.) In doing that I have done all I can do. I am a poor and busy man, and those who are more interested in the matter than I am must carry it out to the end. Gentlemen, I have done.'

'But no one knows so much about it as you,' said the hot gentleman. 'And I am sure if you would work with us you should lose neither time nor dollars, and raise your name to a point at which it would always

stand in the gratitude of your fellow-citizens. Come now.'

'Gentlemen,' said Cross, 'I will sleep over what you said and speak about it to-morrow. I should wish to do my duty if it was rendered in any way possible for me.'

'It shall be,' said the hot gentleman, waving a paper aloft and shaking hands with Cross. Then they all shook hands with him, and Cross was left alone with a look of cool triumph on his face.

'You ought to make a devilish good thing out of those fellows if you play your cards well,' said Arthur, shoving his hat coolly on the back of his head.

'Arthur!' said Cross, with a violent start. 'What are you doing here?'

'I was listening to your humbugging those fellows,' said Arthur. 'But how are you? come and sit down.'

Cross did so, and they entered into conversation. Cross was doing wonderfully well, and would certainly try for legislative honours after he had been seven years whitewashed. His practice was good and steadily improving, the future was very bright before him; neither of them alluded to the past, and they parted apparently good friends, to meet no more.

Arthur having made another successful raid upon the American trotting stables was preparing to return to Pollington with his prize when, taking up his newspaper, he read the following:—

‘HORRIBLE DEATH.—Dr. Cross, whose lectures on toxicology have given delight to so many thousands; and whose splendid exposure of the Dead Rabbit Ring has gained him such universal applause, has fallen a

victim to his ardently rash pursuit of science. He was about to deliver a lecture on the poison fang of the rattlesnake, several of which he had in his possession: his man going in about bedtime to his room discovered him to be quite dead, and called in Dr. Girvan B. Shore. A fang was found fixed firmly between the thumb and forefinger, probably causing death in twenty minutes. But the strange part of the business is this, this fang was not that of a rattler, *but of an Indian cobra, which, judging from its partially dry state, the learned gentleman must have had by him for some years.*'

Arthur gained but few further particulars than the above before he sailed. The catastrophe must have taken place in the dark, as the lamp had gone out; and it was judged that the doctor had been feeling

about close to him, without rising, for some matches. It did not matter ; he was dead.

Yes, with five-and-twenty probable years of life before him ; with brilliant prospects of wealth, honour, and confidence just dawning ; he, who had hitherto escaped the consequences of his actions in a manner almost miraculous, suddenly, at the beginning of a new and fine career, was hoist by his own petard. By an act of careless clumsiness, he had transferred to his own veins the poison which he had so carefully prepared for Gabriel years before.

THE END.

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